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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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179 dead as plane bursts into flames while landing in S Korea

Bird strike suspected to have caused the disaster; there were 2 survivors

SEOUL, 29 DEC

A passenger plane skidded off a runway at a South Korean airport on Sunday, slammed into a concrete fence and burst into flames after its front landing gear apparently failed to deploy. All but two of the 181 people on board died in one of the country's worst aviation disasters.

The Jeju Air plane crashed while landing in the town of Muan, about 290km south of Seoul. The Transport Ministry said the plane was a 15-year-old Boeing 737-800 jet that had arrived from Bangkok and that the crash happened at 9.03am.

A total of 179 people — 85 women, 84 men and 10 others whose genders weren't immediately identifiable — died in the fire, the South Korean fire agency said. Emergency workers pulled two people, both crew members, to safety. Health officials said they are conscious and not in life-threatening condition.

Among the 177 bodies so far found, officials have so far identified 88 of them, the fire agency said. The passengers were predominantly South Korean, as well as two Thai nationals. Thailand's Foreign Ministry said its embassy in Seoul received confirmation from South Korean authorities that the two Thai passengers were among the fatalities.

The fire agency deployed 32 fire trucks and several helicopters to contain the blaze. About 1,570 firefighters, police officers, soldiers and other officials were also sent to the site, according to the fire agency and transport ministry.

Lee Jeong-hyeon, Chief of the Muan fire station, told a televised briefing that the plane was completely destroyed, with only the tail assembly remaining recognisable among the wreckage. Lee said that workers were looking into various possibilities about what caused the crash, including whether the aircraft was struck by birds, Lee said.

Transport Ministry later said, their early assessment of communication records show the airport control tower issued a bird strike warning to the plane shortly before it intended to land and gave its pilot permission to land in a different area. —*PTI*

Firefighters and rescue team members work near the wreckage of a passenger plane at Muan International Airport in Muan, South Korea, on Sunday; Rescue team carry the body of a passenger; A victim rescued is transported to a hospital in Mokpo **PHOTOS: PTI**

FINAL WORDS

Heartbroken families and friends of the passengers rushed to Muan International Airport, desperate for news about their loved ones following the tragic incident. One family shared that they had received a chilling text from their relative aboard the flight just minutes before the crash. The message described a bird stuck to the aircraft's wing. Shortly after, another text arrived: "Should I say my last words?"

According to Yonhap news agency, many locals witnessed the harrowing scene. Some reported seeing flames in the jet's engine, accompanied by multiple explosions.

"I saw the plane descending and thought it was preparing to land," recounted an eyewitness who had been walking approximately 4.5kms from the airport. "Then, I noticed a flash of light, followed by a loud bang. Smoke filled the air, and moments later, I heard a series of explosions."

—*Agencies*

DALAI LAMA TO VISIT BYLAKUPPE ON 5 JAN

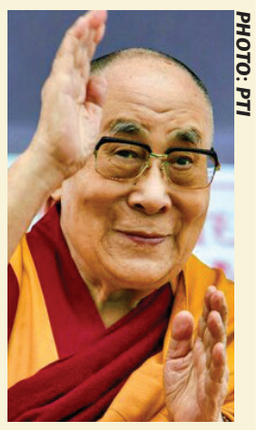

PHOTO: PTI

MYSURU, 29 DEC

Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama will visit Bylakuppe on 5 January as part of its extended stay visit.

Tashi Tundup, Chief of Bylakuppe Tibetan Settlement, stated that during his one-month stay at Tashi Lhunpo Monastery in Bylakuppe Gram Panchayat, the Tibetan spiritual leader will participate only in prayer meetings with Tibetan monks at the Lakshmipura Tibetan Prayer Hall. He will not engage in any public meetings, functions, or ceremonies during his stay. His settlement has also made all preparations for rousing the welcome of their spiritual leader by keeping its surroundings clean. Bylakuppe police station Sub Inspector Ajaykumar said that his department has made all preparations for his security during his stay in monastery.

—***Salar News***

Trump backs Musk in H-1B visa debate

PHOTO: PTI

WASHINGTON DC, 29 DEC

Tesla CEO Elon Musk has received support from US president-elect Donald Trump on his stance on H-1B visas, a day after the tech billionaire vowed to "go to war" to defend the programme used to bring skilled foreign workers to the US. Musk, who along with Indian-American tech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy has been tapped by Trump to lead his Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), argued last week that foreign workers are needed for tech companies like Musk's SpaceX and Tesla. —*PTI*

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Delhi youth dies on 1st day of Sunburn Festival in Goa

PANAJI, 29 DEC

A Delhi resident collapsed and died while attending the Sunburn electronic dance music festival in Dhargal village in north Goa, a police official said on Sunday. The Goa police spokesperson identified the deceased as Karan Kashyap, 26, a resident of Rohini in west Delhi. "The incident took place at 9.45pm on Saturday. Kashyap collapsed and lost consciousness and was immediately taken to a private hospital in Mapusa. He died while undergoing treatment," the official said. —*PTI*

BJP accuses AAP of illegal voter registration in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 29 DEC

BJP has accused the AAP, led by Arvind Kejriwal, of attempting to register "illegal voters" in a bid to secure victory in the upcoming Delhi Assembly elections.

During a press conference, BJP city unit chief Virendra Sachdeva asserted that his party would not permit "fake votes" to be cast in the capital. "We have provided multiple pieces of evidence, but Kejriwal is merely attempting to cover up his wrongdoings by creating confusion among the public," he claimed.

Elections for the 70-member Delhi Assembly are set to take place in February. Earlier on Sunday, Kejriwal alleged that the BJP was manipulating electoral rolls in his New Delhi constituency, claiming the party had filed applications to delete over 5,000 votes since mid-December.

Sachdeva contended that applications submitted after 23 December , when updates to the electoral rolls were frozen, indicated Kejriwal's "manipulation plan" across the 70 constituencies. He also responded to allegations from AAP leader Sanjay Singh regarding efforts to remove his wife's name from the electoral roll, stating that those who applied for the deletion had familial ties to him.

Virendra Sachdeva **PHOTO: X**

He highlighted a surge in new voter applications, particularly in Narela, where over 2,000 registrations were submitted on 24 December alone, with similar patterns on subsequent days. Sachdeva questioned the backgrounds of the applicants, primarily aged between 30 and 48, suggesting they were brought in for the registration push.

In response, BJP leader Pravesh Verma accused AAP and Kejriwal of creating "drama" to distract from governance failures. He urged Kejriwal to provide evidence for his allegations, labelling the claims as mere sensationalism. —*PTI*

Cong accuses Centre of hidden agenda in Singh's memorial

ALAPPUZHA, 29 DEC

Congress on Sunday alleged that Union government could not identify a designated space for performing the last rites of former PM Manmohan Singh, where a memorial could be built later, as it intervened in the matter with a "hidden agenda".

It has long been the practice to set up a memorial at the same place where the last rites are performed. However, the BJP-led Union government mishandled the issue and worsened the situation, the party alleged.

Speaking to reporters here, AICC General Secretary KC Venugopal said that not only Congress party but also Shiromani Akali Dal had harshly criticised the Union government on the matter.

"A designated space was not found for Manmohan Singh's last rites and memorial because the central government intervened in the matter with a specific hidden agenda," he alleged. Meanwhile, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma accused Congress of attempting to stir a controversy over the cremation Singh, despite the Centre announcing a "fitting memorial" to honour his legacy. —*PTI*

>>> More on Page 3

Centre to decide on Dallewal's eviction: Farmer leaders

CHANDIGARH, 29 DEC

With Jagjit Singh Dallewal's indefinite hunger strike entering its 34th day on Sunday, farmer leaders at Khanauri said they have been following the Gandhian way to continue their protest and it is up to the government to decide whether it wants to use force to evict their senior leader.

Their statement comes amid the Supreme Court's strong criticism of the Punjab government for not shifting Dallewal to a hospital.

The farmers have been protesting at the Punjab-Haryana border to press the Centre for several demands, including a legal guarantee for a minimum support price (MSP) for crops. —*PTI*

AN ODE TO CRICKET CAREER

Former cricketer EAS Prasanna, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, Infosys founder NR Narayana Murthy, and cricket legends Kapil Dev, VVS Laxman, Rahul Dravid, and Anil Kumble at the release of 'Stumped', the autobiography of former cricketer Syed Kirmani, in Bengaluru on Sunday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

'Russia accidentally shot down jetliner'

BAKU, 29 DEC

Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev has asserted that a recent airliner crash in Kazakhstan was the result of an unintentional shot down by Russia. Addressing Azerbaijani state television, Aliyev stated, "We can say with complete clarity that the plane was shot down by Russia... it was done." He noted that the aircraft lost control due to electronic warfare while being hit by ground fire over Russia. He accused Moscow of attempting to downplay the incident, expressing disappointment in their initial responses. The crash resulted in the deaths of 38 people. The Kremlin acknowledged that air defence systems were active near Grozny to counter a Ukrainian drone strike. —*PTI*

QUEEN RULES 2ND TIME

Humpy clinches women's Rapid chess title

NEW YORK, 29 DEC

Grandmaster Koneru Humpy capped a wonderful year for Indian chess, defeating Irene Sukandar of Indonesia to emerge the FIDE Women's World Rapid Chess champion here on Sunday.

Humpy had won the event back in 2019 at Georgia and the Indian No. 1 is only the second player after China's Ju Wenjun to clinch the title more than once.

Koneru Humpy (R) during a match at the FIDE World Rapid Chess Championship, in New York **PHOTO: PTI**

> **It's not easy to become a World Champion at 37. It's quite difficult when you get older to keep that motivation and stay sharp when required**
> —Koneru Humpy, Grandmaster

Humpy's achievement laced a sensational year for the chess fraternity after D Gukesh defeated China's Ding Liren to emerge champion in the classical format World Championship recently in Singapore. Humpy, who started the tournament here with a first-round defeat, was the lone winner in the 11th and final round, helping her to top the tables with 8.5 points, half a point clear of six others. "I'm very excited and happy. In fact, I expected it to be a very tough day, like some sort of tie-break. But when I finished the game, the arbitrator told me (about winning), and it was a tense moment for me," said Humpy, who began with black pieces, after her victory. "So, this is quite unexpected because the whole year I have been struggling and I had very bad tournaments where I just ended up in last place. So, this came as a surprise," she added.

Ju Wenjun of China finished second as the tie-break was resolved while Kateryna Lagno of Russia ended third. Harika, who had eight points, had to be content with a fifth-place finish. —*PTI*

There's 'shivling' below Yogi's home, dig it: Akhilesh

LUCKNOW, 29 DEC

Akhilesh Yadav; Yogi Adityanath **PHOTO: PTI**

Samajwadi Party Chief Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday alleged that a 'shivling' lies beneath the official residence of the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath in Lucknow, urging for its excavation. Speaking to reporters, Yadav stated, "There is a shivling under the Chief Minister's residence. It should also be excavated." His comment comes amid rising political tensions surrounding recent archaeological surveys in Uttar Pradesh.

Last week, a 250-foot-deep stepwell from the 1857 revolt era was uncovered during a survey in Sambhal, Uttar Pradesh. The excavation, conducted with the help of bulldozers in the Laxman Ganj area, revealed the stepwell, coinciding with the discovery of the ruins of an ancient Banke Bihari temple in the same area.

Yadav accused BJP of using these archaeological findings to divert attention from issues such as unemployment and agrarian issues. He referred to the Places of Worship Act, which protects the religious character of places of worship, warning against unnecessary excavations. Yadav pointed out that despite being in power for several years, the country faces record levels of unemployment. —*Agencies*

PHOTO: X

Death toll in Hubballi fire rises to 6

HUBBALLI, 29 DEC

With the death of two more Ayyappa Swamy devotees from Hubballi on Sunday, the toll from the tragic incident has risen to six. The deceased were identified as Shankar Parushram Chavan, 29, a ward assistant at Karnataka Medical College and Research Institute (KMCRI), and Manjunath Sanjay Waghmode, 18, a student. Shankar, an orphan living with his aunt in Aashraya Colony, Sattur, Dharwad, succumbed to his injuries at 1.30 am, while Manjunath, from Achavvana Colony, Sai Nagar, passed away at 10.15 am. Hospital authorities reported that of the remaining three injured, two are in critical condition, while the minor is recovering. The nine devotees suffered burns in a fire caused by a gas leak on 19 December and were admitted to KIMS Hospital, Hubballi. *—Salar News*

Police raid bars for timing violations and overpricing

BENGALURU 29 DEC

Simultaneous raids were conducted on multiple bars across the city for allegedly operating beyond permissible hours and selling liquor at prices exceeding the Maximum Retail Price (MRP). Acting on credible information, police raided two bars in Bagalagunte around 4 am on Sunday, finding them in violation of the city's time limit for operations. A case was registered, and the manager of one of the bars was booked for the offence. In a similar operation, patrolling teams raided three bars in Peenya following reports of liquor being sold at inflated prices. Two individuals were booked in connection with the incident, and six boxes of alcohol bottles were seized from the premises. The police have confirmed that further investigations into the matter are underway. As per Bengaluru regulations, bars and hotels are permitted to operate only until 1 am. Violations of these rules can result in strict legal action, including fines and suspension of licences. *—Salar News*

Locals apprehend bike thief, hand him over to police

BENGALURU 29 DEC

A midnight bike theft attempt in JP Nagar was thwarted by alert residents, who apprehended the thief after a brief chase and handed him over to the police. The incident occurred around 12:30am on Sunday on 34th Main Road. The accused had broken the handle lock of a bike parked outside an apartment and was attempting to push it away. The bike's owner, alerted by suspicious noises, stepped out to investigate and caught the thief in the act. The owner called for help, and nearby residents quickly joined in, chasing and cornering the suspect. Before being handed over to JP Nagar police, the thief was roughed up by the crowd. Police have taken the accused into custody and are continuing their investigation. *—Salar News*

Man arrested for selling ganja in Chamarajanagar

MYSURU, 29 DEC

Hanur police arrested a man while attempting to sell ganja near Sampigeshwara temple in Lokkanahalli in Chamarajanagar district. They recovered 175 grams of dry ganja worth Rs 8, 750 in the market from the accused. According to the police, the accused has been identified as Mannada, a resident of Uddatti village of the taluk. Acting on a tip off, a police team led by Hour PSI Manjunathaprasad caught him in the act, arrested and produced him to judicial custody on Saturday. *—Salar News*

Priyank's aide booked in contractor's death

Panchal ended his life by lying down in front of a train in Kalaburagi on Thursday

KALABURAGI, 29 DEC

- State BJP president BY Vijayendra indicated that the suicide note included serious accusations against Kapanur, claiming it detailed a hit contract on their party leaders. Priyank refuted the claims, stating his name was not mentioned in Panchal's note

A case has been filed against Raju Kapanur, a close aide of Minister Priyank Kharge, alongside five others, amid allegations of plotting the murder of BJP MLA Basavaraj Mattimadu and other party leaders. The investigation follows a suicide note from civil contractor Sachin Panchal, who took his own life on Thursday by lying in front of an oncoming train. In his note, Panchal accused Kapanur and his associates of making death threats against him.

In response to the tragic event, Bidar District-In Charge Minister Eshwar Khandre visited Panchal's family, who expressed their anger and grief, blaming the authorities for their loss. Khandre assured them that justice would be pursued, announcing an ex-gratia payment of Rs 10 lakh for the family. He stated that action had already been taken against several police officials for their failure to register a case earlier. The Government Railway Police (GRP) are currently investigating the suicide, with the potential for the inquiry to be escalated to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). BJP has reacted, calling for the case to be transferred to CBI.

State BJP president BY Vijayendra indicated that the suicide note included serious accusations against Kapanur, claiming it detailed a hit contract on their party leaders. In contrast, Priyank Kharge refuted the claims, stating his name was not mentioned in Panchal's note, and suggested that financial dealings between Panchal and Kapanur warranted further scrutiny. *—PTI*

Priyank Kharge PHOTO: X

Does Ambedkar's Constitution not apply to Kharges: BJP

BENGALURU, 29 DEC

The opposition BJP has launched a scathing attack on Mallikarjun Kharge following the alleged suicide of a contractor in Karnataka, questioning whether the Constitution is applicable to the Congress president's family.

In a statement, Leader of the Opposition R Ashoka accused Kharge's son, state Minister Priyank Kharge, of being responsible for the death of Bidar-based civil contractor, Sachin Panchal. "Does Ambedkar's Constitution not apply to the Kharge family? Priyank Kharge, who preaches to everyone, should resign and demonstrate morality," Ashoka demanded.

He alleged that Kharge's close associates were involved in the circumstances surrounding Panchal's death.

In an alleged suicide note, Panchal attributed blame to Kharge's close aide, Raju Kapanur, accusing him of issuing death threats regarding financial matters. In response, Kharge dismissed the allegations. *—PTI*

ALL EYES ON CROWD

CCTV cameras installed on Brigade Road to monitor the crowds celebrating the New Year in Bengaluru on Sunday PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

POCSO accused ends life with gelatine sticks

MYSURU, 29 DEC

PHOTO: PTI

A tragic incident unfolded in a village within Nagamangala Taluk, Mandya district, where a young man took his own life by igniting gelatin sticks outside the residence of the girl he loved on Saturday.

Ramachandru, 21, ended his life using gelatin sticks typically employed in local stone quarrying and crusher operations, resulting in severe abdominal injuries that led to his immediate death at the scene.

The young man had been in love with a minor girl and had eloped with her a year prior. However, following a complaint lodged by the girl's parents, a case was filed under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO), leading to his arrest and three months in prison. After the two families reached a compromise and the girl's parents withdrew the case, he was subsequently released.

Despite his efforts to reconnect with the girl post-release, he was unable to locate her as her parents had barred any further contact. In a state of despair, Ramachandru ultimately resorted to suicide with the gelatin sticks.

Upon receiving reports of the incident, the Nagamangala Police, along with a Bomb Disposal Squad, were dispatched to the scene to assess the explosion's impact.

Mandya Superintendent of Police Mallikarjuna Baladandi addressed the media, confirming the previous POCSO case against Ramachandru and detailing his background as a truck driver.

He also noted that Ramachandru had been drinking with friends the night before the tragic event. The police are currently investigating the source of the gelatin sticks, intending to hold accountable those who supplied them to Ramachandru.

—Salar News

DKS says mourning won't affect New Year events

BENGALURU, 29 DEC

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Sunday announced that the government won't stop individual New Year's celebrations in Bengaluru, but has declared mourning for government work and offices after the demise of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Shivakumar emphasised the importance of maintaining law and order, especially in an international city like Bengaluru. To ensure public safety, nearly 10,000 cameras have been installed across the city.

"Almost 10 thousand cameras were installed for the safety of everyone for the New Year celebration, it's an international city so we should be careful about law and order and we don't even restrict business fraternity as well. Everyone must maintain law and order, you can consider this as a warning or request.," he said.

A seven-day mourning has been announced in Karnataka after Manmohan Singh's demise. "A government holiday has been declared from 27 December," Karnataka CMO said in a statement.

Manmohan Singh passed away at AIIMS, Delhi, on Thursday evening at the age of 92 due to age-related medical conditions.

President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi, and leaders across the political spectrum condoled Manmohan Singh's death.

Singh retired from the Rajya Sabha earlier this year after serving for 33 years in the house.

Singhserved two terms as Prime Minister of India- from 2004 to 2014. *—ANI*

Deputy Chief Minister said mourning has been declared for government work and offices following the demise of former PM Manmohan Singh, but individual New Year celebrations will not be affected PHOTO: X

Tourists disappointed as curbs impact Mandya and Mysuru visits

MYSURU, 29 DEC

Tourists visiting Mandya and Mysuru are facing disappointment due to various restrictions imposed in light of State mourning following the death of former prime minister Manmohan Singh.

The popular Musical Fountain show at the Krishnaraja Sagar (KRS) Reservoir in Mandya has been suspended until 1 January as part of the mourning period. Additionally, the illumination of Mysuru Palace and other cultural events, including New Year celebrations, have been cancelled.

Cauvery Neeravari Nigam Limited, which manages the Brindavan Gardens, has also restricted tourist access to the musical fountain. However, tourists can still visit KRS Dam, Brindavan Gardens, Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary, and other tourist spots. Mysuru Palace Board has also cancelled its usual New Year fireworks and police band performances due to the mourning

According to M Narayanagowda, President of the Mysuru District Hotel Owners Association, nearly all of the 10,500 available rooms in the city's hotels and homestays are fully booked through 1 January.

The Forest Department has also restricted stays at its jungle lodges and resorts in Bandipur, Nagarhole, and BRT Tiger Reserves over New Year's weekend (30-31 December). This is due to concerns about noise disturbances affecting wildlife. However, safari centers and entry to Himavad Gopalaswamy Temple in Bandipur remain open, with all online bookings for safaris fully booked. An advisory is issued to resorts in Gundlupet, HD Kote, Chamarajanagar, Hanur, Kollegal, and Yelandur prohibiting camps, DJ music, lighting arrangements, that may disturb animals in the area. *—Salar News*

Chitra Santhe from 5 Jan-4 Feb

BENGALURU, 29 DEC

PHOTO: ANI

Bengaluru is set to host the 22nd edition of Chitra Santhe, organised by the Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath, starting on 5 January. This year's event, themed "The Girl Child," highlights pressing issues such as child abuse and the challenges faced by young girls. For the first time, the festival will be in a hybrid format, with an online exhibition running from 5 January to 4 February on 'ckpvirtualworld.in,' offering global access to artworks. Over 1,500 artists from 22 states are expected to participate, showcasing a vibrant collection of 1,420 artworks, including contributions from senior citizens, artists with disabilities, hobbyists, and professionals. The event will be inaugurated by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah at the Parishath campus on Kumara Krupa Road.

- Special stalls will also cater to senior citizens at the Seva Dal Ground. Karnataka boasts the highest number of participants, followed by Maharashtra, TN and Kerala

Special stalls will also cater to senior citizens at the Seva Dal Ground. Karnataka boasts the highest number of participants, followed by Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Kerala. *—Salar News*

'Keep politicians out of cricket'

BENGALURU, 29 DEC

Speaking at the launch of former India wicketkeeper Syed Kirmani's autobiography on Sunday, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar emphasised the need to keep politicians out of cricket administration to preserve the integrity of the sport.

Shivakumar said, "Politicians must be kept out of cricket. In my personal opinion, they are dangerous for sports. The game should be administered by cricketers themselves."

Praising Kirmani, Shivakumar described him as "a good human being with a pure heart" and acknowledged his contributions to making Karnataka and India proud. "When I was in school, I admired players like Chandrashekhar, GR Viswanath, and Kirmani. I remember writing letters to KSCA for tickets and distributing them among my friends, which helped me become a leader of sorts back then," he said.

He highlighted the lack of training centres in the past and applauded cricketers' achievements. He said, "Good character is crucial to staying at the top. He is a shining example of this."

—Salar News

Abu Dhabi Islamic Bank VP says Islamic banking is 'fair alternative'

BENGALURU, 29 DEC

Speaking at Sir Ismaeel Seth Mosque in Frazer Town, Ikram-ur-Rehman, Vice President of Abu Dhabi Islamic Bank said that, Usury (riba) is wrong not only in Islam but across all religions. He said, "In today's world, this practice has harmful effects, with the flow of money shifting from the poor to the rich. The poor invest their savings in small funds and mutual funds, which are then directed to banks. These banks, in turn, use the funds to support large corporate houses".

He highlighted the growing need for an economic system that does not exploit workers, noting that in a time when farmer suicides have become common, it would be a mistake to overlook Islamic banking. He called the current banking system inhumane. He said Islamic banking, based on Shariah principles, prohibits riba (interest) and gharar (speculation) and ensures that transactions are based on tangible assets and mutual benefit.

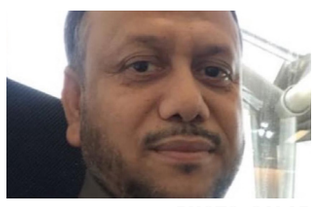


PHOTO: SALAR

He said, this fosters a balanced risk-and-reward system, ensuring that interests of banks and consumers are aligned. *—Salar News*

FOSTERING INDIA-JAPAN TIES

Bengaluru gears up for Japan Habba 2025

BENGALURU, 29 DEC

The 20th edition of Japan Habba, a premier cultural exchange event, will take place on 12 January, at Chamara Vajra, Palace Grounds in Bengaluru. Organised with support from the Consulate-General of Japan in Bengaluru and the Japan Foundation, the event will run from 9.30am to 8.30am and is expected to attract 10,000 to 12,000 attendees.

Japan Habba celebrates Japanese culture and strengthens ties between India and Japan. The event features activities like fighting game tournaments in collaboration with The Versus Festival and Pokémon Go Bengaluru. Competitions in games such as Super Smash Bros. Ultimate, Street Fighter 6, and Tekken will draw gaming enthusiasts and community legends from Japan and the US.

The festival will host India's largest anime quiz, karaoke contests and a cultural play comparing Indian and Japanese traditions PHOTO: JAPANHABBA

The festival will also host India's largest anime quiz, karaoke contests, group dances, live calligraphy exhibitions, and a cultural play comparing Indian and Japanese traditions. Visitors can enjoy authentic Japanese food, including Sushi, Bon Curry Bread, Tofu, and Teriyaki, at an extensive food court with 20+ restaurants and vendors.

Launched in 2005, Japan Habba has grown into an annual event that allows students of the Japanese language and others interested in Japan to immerse themselves in its culture. The name "Japan Habba" combines "Japan" with the Kannada word 'Habba,' meaning festival, symbolizing the celebration of Indo-Japanese relations. The event has evolved significantly, with the 2023 edition marking a milestone. The upcoming 20th edition is expected to be a grand celebration, further enhancing the cultural bonds between the two nations. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: X

Shiv Sena veteran Satishchandra Pradhan dies

THANE, 29 DEC

Former Shiv Sena MP and first mayor of Thane, Satishchandra Pradhan, passed away on Sunday at a hospital here due to age-related health issues, his family members said. Pradhan's funeral procession will leave his house on Monday morning. The former Rajya Sabha member played a key role in forming the Shiv Sena alongside Bal Thackeray in 1966. He expanded the party organisation in Thane city and district. As the first mayor of Thane Municipal Corporation, Pradhan was a key figure in the city's development. *—PTI*

'Ayodhya Ram temple to be ready by June 2025'

AYODHYA, 29 DEC

Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Temple Construction Committee Chairman Nripendra Mishra announced the completion of construction by June 2025, with rampart and shoe racks until September, with rising tower construction being checked for aviation safety. Speaking to the media, Mishra said, "We are committed to completing all construction work by June 2025, except for the ramparts and shoe racks, which are estimated to go on till September 2025." "85 murals will be set up in the museum, of which work on 60 murals has already begun, and 21 murals. including 6 murals of Ram have been completed... New titanium lattices are being made for the Parikrama on the ground, first and second floors," Mishra added. The 'Pran Pratishtha' of Shri Ram Lalla at Ayodhya's historic temple was held on 22 January, with PM Modi performing Vedic rituals, led by a group of priests. *—ANI*

CPI(M) MLA's son among 9 held for possessing ganja

ALAPPUZHA, 29 DEC

U Pratibha MLA denied the reports that her son was arrested with ganja on Saturday, after the officials of the excise department arrested nine people for possessing the narcotics. Her son also rejected the allegations on social media. The Kayamkulam MLA on a Facebook live alleged that her son was only questioned when he was sitting with his friends, adding that the media was hunting her. "Since the news broke, I have been receiving many phone calls, " she said. "If the news is true, I will apologise. If not, the media should apologise publicly," the MLA added. The Excise Department said that they have arrested nine people, with ganja from Thakazhi in Kuttanad in Alappuzha district. According to the officers, all nine were released on bail. *—PTI*

'Ayya' is everything for us: Anbumani after clash with dad

TINDIVANAM, 29 DEC

A day after clashing with his father and PMK founder Dr S Ramadoss over the appointment of his nephew to a key party post, party president Dr Anbumani Ramadoss on Sunday held discussions with the former, and asserted "Ayya is everything for us." Ramadoss is respectfully addressed as "Maruthuvar Ayya" (Doctor Sir) or "Ayya," by party workers and supporters. Anbumani met his father at the latter's Thailapuram residence here, in Villupuram district, and later told reporters the appointment row was an internal issue which the party would discuss. Pattali Makkal Katchi is a strong proponent of the caste survey. Anbumani said a team discussed with his father, issues related to the matter, including planning agitations on the matter in the coming days, besides an upcoming party conference. *—PTI*

Rot has set in Cong: Pranab's daughter flags 'sad state'

She questions why there were no CWC meet after her dad's death

NEW DELHI, 29 DEC

Sharmistha Mukherjee, the daughter of former president Pranab Mukherjee, alleged on Sunday that decay has set in the Congress and stressed the need for serious introspection on the "sad state of affairs" in the party.

Mukherjee lamented that several old Congress workers feel alienated from the party today due to the current state of affairs and the lack of an ideology among the top leaders.

She also raised questions as to why no Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting was convened after her father's death and a resolution passed.

Mukherjee said she felt bad when no CWC meeting was convened after her father's demise. The CWC is the highest decision-making body of the Congress.

"The Congress has to answer for this. I can only state the fact. But I would like to just add, I do not know whether it was deliberate or sheer negligence. What are the conventions in such a grand old party?" she asked.

Sharmistha Mukerjee *PHOTO: ANI*

"Congress, rather than unleashing trolls on social media, should do serious introspection that why a person like me who believed in the hardcore Congress ideology, today feels alienated by the party," she said.

Speaking on the row over the setting up of a memorial for former prime minister Manmohan Singh, Mukherjee said she would not venture into the controversy as she is not part of the Congress anymore and has quit politics.

Earlier, in a post on X, Mukherjee said: "When baba passed away, Congress didn't even bother to call CWC for a condolence meeting. A senior leader told me it's not done for Presidents. That's utter rubbish as I learned later from baba's diaries that on K R Narayanan's death, CWC was called and condolence msg was drafted by baba only." *—PTI*

Gandhi's ignore non-Gandhis in Cong: Pralhad

Agartala, 29 DEC

Union minister Pralhad Joshi on Sunday alleged that the Gandhi family has never accorded respect to non-Gandhi Congress leaders. He claimed, "Not only former prime minister (Manmohan Singh), Congress did not accord due respect to P V Narasimha Rao and former president Pranab Mukherjee.

MANN KI BAAT

Constitution stood every test of time: PM

NEW DELHI, 29 DEC

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the Constitution has stood every test of time, lauding it as "our guiding light".

Speaking in his monthly Mann ki Baat broadcast, Modi noted that the next Republic Day will mark the 75th anniversary of the implementation of the Constitution.

"It is a matter of immense pride for all of us. The Constitution which its makers gave to us has stood every test of time. It is our guiding light, our guide," he said.

Modi also lauded the farmers of Golamunda block in Odisha's Kalahandi district for the "vegetable revolution" in the area. Modi also highlighted the growing global resonance of ayurveda, citing the inspiring work being done in Paraguay.

He described the upcoming 'Maha Kumbh' as the "Maha Kumbh of unity" as he asked people to return from the grand religious congregation with a resolve to banish hate and division from the society.

Narendra Modi *PHOTO: PTI*

Meanwhile, India will host the World Audio Visual Entertainment Summit (WAVES) for the first time in February next year which will be a global platform for its creative talents, fostering collaborations and showcasing the country's potential as a hub for world-class content creation. *—PTI*

India not 'lucky' on security, stay vigilant: Rajnath to Army

MHOW, 29 DEC

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday termed India a "not very lucky" nation on the security front and urged soldiers to keep a sharp eye on internal and external foes who are always active.

The minister was addressing Army personnel at the more than two centuries old Mhow cantonment in the Indore district of Madhya Pradesh.

"Taking the security scenario into account, Bharat is not a very lucky country because our northern and western borders continuously face challenges," said Singh.

The Mhow cantonment is home to three premier training institutes – Army War College, Military College of Telecommunication Engineering and Infantry School – other than the Infantry Museum and Army Marksmanship Unit.

"We also face challenges on the internal front. In the backdrop of this, we can't sit quiet, unconcerned. Our enemies, whether internal or external, remain active always. In these circumstances, we must keep a close eye on their activities and take appropriate, timely and effective steps against them," he said.

To make Bharat a developed and self-reliant country by 2017, the Army's role is very crucial, Singh said.

"This patch of time, though often referred to as peacetime, struck me deeply when I arrived and witnessed the discipline and dedication with which you are undergoing training. Your regimen is no less than that of a war," he told the gathering. *—PTI*

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh at the the Infantry Museum at BR Ambedkar's birthplace, in Mhow of Indore district *PHOTO: PTI*

EC DATA REVEALS

Only 2.5% NRI voters turned up for LS polls

NEW DELHI, 29 DEC

Overseas Indians showed great enthusiasm in registering as electors, with nearly 1.2 lakh enrolling in the voter list, but a minuscule turned up to exercise their franchise in the Lok Sabha elections this year.

According to the data released by the Election Commission, as many as 1,19,374 registered as overseas electors in 2024, with Kerala witnessing the highest registrations at 89,839. In 2019, as many as 99,844 had registered as overseas electors.

The poll authority said only 2,958 overseas electors (2.47 per cent) flew down to India to participate in the largest democratic exercise in the world. Of these, an overwhelming 2,670 were from Kerala alone.

Several large states such as Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh,

PHOTO: X

and Tamil Nadu saw zero turnout of overseas electors. Gujarat, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home state, saw only two out of 885 overseas electors casting their votes. The same was the story in Maharashtra, where only 17 of the 5,097 NRI electors voted.

There was an increase of little over 19,500 registered overseas electors since the 2019 general election.

While NRI voters is a generic term, the EC describes them as overseas electors. – Indians living abroad and eligible to vote in direct elections. *—PTI*

'DRAVIDIANISM, COMMUNISM IDEOLOGY SAME'

CHENNAI, 29 DEC

The ties between Dravidianism and communism were beyond electoral politics and the "ideological friendship" would stay on forever, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin said on Sunday.

The "political friendship" between the two movements may have taken the occasional break, he said in an apparent reference to alliance regrouping, "but the ideological friendship will continue under all circumstances."

"It is bound to continue," the chief minister, also president of the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) said at an event organised to mark the birth centenary of freedom fighter and CPI veteran R Nallakannu, in the Tamil Nadu capital.

Veteran leader Singaravelar had supported Periyar when he founded Dravidar Kazhagam (DK). *—PTI*

Beed murder: CM calls for property seizure

MUMBAI, 29 DEC

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has asked the police's Crime Investigation Department (CID) to confiscate properties of the accused in the murder case of Massajog sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh.

A Home department official on Saturday also said Fadnavis has asked the authorities to cancel the arms licenses of people whose pictures or videos showing them firing in the air or flaunting guns in public have circulated on social media.

Fadnavis, who took over as CM on 5 December following the BJP-led coalition's election victory and who holds the Home portfolio, is facing heat from the opposition over the brutal murder of the sarpanch in Beed district earlier this month.

The Maharashtra police's CID has taken over the probe into the murder case.

Devendra Fadnavis *PHOTO: PTI*

Meanwhile, participants of a huge protest rally in Beed on Saturday, attended by MLAs and local leaders of opposition and ruling parties in Beed, demanded that NCP minister Dhananjay Munde, who hails from the district, be removed.

The role of Walmik Karad, an associate of Munde, has come under the scanner after the sarpanch's murder.

According to police, Deshmukh was apparently killed after he opposed an extortion bid targeting an energy firm which is installing windmills in Beed district. *—PTI*

Delhi polls: Sisodia unveils education manifesto

NEW DELHI, 29 DEC

Senior AAP leader Manish Sisodia on Sunday announced the education manifesto for the Jangpura constituency ahead of the upcoming Delhi Assembly elections.

The manifesto outlines a comprehensive plan to enhance education infrastructure, improve opportunities for the students and involve the parents and educators in shaping the children's future.

Speaking on the importance of quality education, Sisodia said, "Quality education for children is the key to the progress of any family. We all aspire our children to grow up to be successful and respected individuals."

The manifesto focuses on building two fully equipped new schools in Sarai Kale Khan and Hazrat Nizamuddin along with modernising facilities in existing schools in Feroz Shah Kotla. *—PTI*

CPI(M) links MLA to Cong leader's death

WAYANAD, 29 DEC

The suicide of a Congress leader in Kerala and his son has triggered a political row in Kerala's Wayanad as the ruling CPI(M) alleged that a cooperative bank job scam involving the grand old party's MLA IC Balakrishnan was the reason for their extreme step. Balakrishnan has denied the charges.

Wayanad District Congress Committee treasurer NM Vijayan, 78, and his son Jijesh, 38, allegedly consumed poison at their home and were found by their neighbours in critical condition on Tuesday, police said. "A person who is holding the post of the MLA has a key role in the issue. There is also another issue that the KPCC leadership was not ready to intervene in it despite receiving a complaint. So, the CPI(M) is viewing it as a serious matter," CPI(M) Wayanad district secretary K Rafeeq said.

IC Balakrishnan *PHOTO: FACEBOOK*

Meanwhile, CPI(M)'s central committee member AK Balan on Sunday reiterated the party's position that they had no involvement in the murder of two youth congress workers in Periya five years ago. *—PTI*

Ballots better than EVMs, says Akhilesh

LUCKNOW, 29 DEC

Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday called for elections to be conducted using ballot papers, citing a lack of trust in electronic voting machines (EVMs).

The former Uttar Pradesh chief minister said this at a press conference at party headquarters alongside Rahul Kumar Kamboj, an Indian-origin Parliamentarian in Germany.

"Even a country like Germany conducts elections using ballot papers. But in India, elections are conducted with EVMs to serve vested interests," Yadav said.

Emphasising the need for elections that inspire confidence, he said, "No one trusts EVMs. Even the faces of those who win elections seem dejected as they too do not have faith in the system." *—PTI*

EXPERTS OPINE

Religious disputes loom over 2027 UP polls

LUCKNOW, 29 DEC

Although the Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls are due only in 2027, political experts suggest that the increasing number of temple-mosque disputes in the state and the resultant polarisation have started to set the political narrative.

Analysts point to the recent bypolls in the state where slogans like "Batenge to Katenge" (divided we perish) played a key role in ensuring Hindu unity.

And it is in this backdrop that the experts feel that the intensifying temple-mosque polarisation pitch has its own implications.

"During the bypolls, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's 'Batenge to Katenge' slogan was seen as a response to the Samajwadi Party's (SP) attempt to create caste-based mobilisation using the PDA (Backwards, Dalits, Minorities) move. The outcome (of the bypolls) was clearly in favour of the BJP," political analyst Rajeev Ranjan told PTI.

Police personnel instal metal detectors at the entrance of Shahi Jama Masjid, in Sambhal *PHOTO: ANI*

Such expert opinions are fuelled by a recent spate of claims -- from the existence of a Shivling in Varanasi's Gyanvapi mosque to similar assertions in Sambhal, Badaun, Aligarh, Muzaffarnagar and Bulandshahr.

In the latest case, a petition was filed in Badaun earlier this month, claiming that a Neelkanth Mahadev temple existed where the Jama Masjid now stands. A local court will hear the maintainability of the plea in January.

Meanwhile, violence erupted in November during a court-ordered survey of Sambhal's Shahi Jama Masjid, leaving four people dead. Hindu groups have claimed that a Hariharanath temple previously existed where the Mughal-era mosque stands. *—PTI*

Guv Khan bids farewell to Kerala, calls bond lifelong

T'PURAM, 29 DEC

Outgoing Governor of Kerala Arif Mohammed Khan on Sunday left Kerala and said that the state will hold a "very special place" in his heart and his association with it is lifelong.

He said he was extremely thankful and full of gratitude for all the love, affection, and support the people of the state have given him.

Talking to reporters here before leaving the state, Khan also expressed 'best wishes' to the Government of Kerala and people of the state.

Beginning his brief address in Malayalam, he said : "My term has come to an end. But, Kerala has a very special place now in my heart. And, my feelings, my association with Kerala is not going to come to an end. It is a lifelong bond now."

Arif Mohammed Khan *PHOTO: X*

When reporters asked about his strained relationship with the CPI(M)-led LDF government over various issues including the appointment of vice-chancellors of universities, Khan said there has been no turbulence during the period.

Khan would assume office of the Governor of Bihar in the coming days while Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar would take charge as the new governor of Kerala. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Gunfire in Patiala: Sikh activist escapes unhurt

PATIALA, 29 DEC

Sikh activist Bakshish Singh escaped unhurt after unidentified assailants opened fire at his car in this Punjab district, police said on Sunday. The incident took place around 1:30 am on the Patiala South Bypass road near Urban Estate, they added. According to Patiala's Senior Superintendent of Police Nanak Singh, the incident is being investigated and an FIR has been lodged at the Urban State police station. According to police sources, Baba Bakshish Singh, who has been raising various issues, including those of "Bandi Singhs" (Sikh prisoners), was returning from the Gurdwara Karhali Sahib, near Samana, to his residence in SST Nagar when the unidentified assailants fired at his car. According to the sources, two or three rounds were fired at Bakshish Singh's car but he managed to escape unhurt. *—PTI*

Class 10 student jumps before train in UP, dies

AMROHA, 29 DEC

A Class-10 student allegedly committed suicide by jumping in front of a running train in Uttar Pradesh's Amroha district, railway police said. The victim has been identified as Mehak, 16, a resident of Avantika Nagar in Gajraula town, Government Railway Police (GRP) said. Mehak, who left home for school on Friday morning, jumped before the running train near Bhanpur. A crowd of passers-by informed police after which RPF and GRP teams reached the spot and sent the body for autopsy, GRP outpost in-charge Gajraula Rajiv Singh said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Molten slag kills 2 crane operators in Chhattisgarh

RAIPUR, 29 DEC

Two crane operators of an industrial unit in Chhattisgarh capital Raipur died after hot slag fell on them, a police official said on Sunday. The mishap took place at Hindustan Coils Limited in Siltara under Dharsiwara police station limits late Saturday night, he said. "Crane operators Somu Rai, 30, and Jitendra Sriwas, 32, who were on night shift, died after molten slag, which is a by-product of steel manufacturing, fell on them from a furnace. The bodies have been sent for post mortem. Rai hailed from Arrah in Bihar, while Sriwas was from Janjgir-Champa," he said. *—PTI*

FIR against Sikh for pro-Khalistan posts in UP

PILIBHIT, 29 DEC

Police in this Uttar Pradesh district have lodged an FIR against a Sikh man for allegedly posting pictures of himself carrying weapons on social media and expressing support for Khalistan, officials said on Sunday. "An FIR has been registered against the accused, Gursewak Singh, under relevant legal provisions. A thorough investigation into the matter is underway," Nagar Kotwali Station House Officer (SHO) Rajeev Kumar Singh told reporters. Police said on 23 December, three alleged Khalistan supporters were killed in an encounter during an operation jointly conducted by the Uttar Pradesh Police and Punjab Police in the Puranpur area of Pilibhit. Subsequently, Gursewak Singh, a resident of Haryana's Sirsa, triggered a controversy by posting content supporting Khalistan on Facebook. *—PTI*

Katra remains shut for 5th day against ropeway project

BJP MLA threatens hunger strike over detainees' release

REASI/JAMMU, 29 DEC

The Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Sangharsh Samiti, which has called for the shutdown, announced that all activities in Katra would remain suspended during the bandh **PHOTO: PTI**

Katra, the base camp for the Vaishno Devi pilgrimage in Jammu and Kashmir, remained shut for the fifth consecutive day on Sunday in protest against a proposed ropeway project in the Trikuta hills, with BJP MLA Baldev Raj Sharma threatening to sit on a hunger strike if those detained are not released within 24 hours.

Meanwhile, five men continue to sit on a hunger strike, demanding the release of those detained by police during earlier demonstrations in the holy town.

The Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Sangharsh Samiti initially called for the shutdown on 25 December. On Friday night, it extended the bandh by 72 hours to press its demands, including shelving the proposed ropeway project and releasing the detained protesters.

The Samiti, which represents shopkeepers, pony operators and palanquin owners, argues that the ropeway would destroy the livelihoods of local business owners and has demanded that the project be scrapped. Sharma, who joined the protesters on Sunday, warned the administration of a chain hunger strike if the detained samiti members are not released within 24 hours.

"I will sit on a hunger strike with my people if the administration does not release those detained. The administration should immediately release them," the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLA told the protesters.

He added that the BJP has raised the issue with Union Home Minister Amit Shah and other leaders in Delhi.

"Our representatives went to Delhi and the home minister has taken cognisance of the issue. Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board announced plans last month to install a ropeway to facilitate access to the temple for senior citizens, children. *—PTI*

'DIED DUE TO HYPOTHERMIA'

Sumit Meena slipped into open shaft of borewell on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

10-yr-old MP boy who fell into borewell dies

BHOPAL, 29 DEC

A 10-year-old boy, who fell into a 140-feet borewell in Madhya Pradesh's Guna district, lost the battle for life despite hectic efforts by multiple agencies for 16 hours to save him, officials said on Sunday.

The boy, Sumit Meena, slipped into the open shaft of the borewell at around 5 pm on Saturday in Pipliya village under Raghogarh assembly segment, located 50 km from the Guna district headquarters.

He was unresponsive when he was brought out at around 9.30 am on Sunday, the officials said.

The boy was rushed to a hospital in Raghogarh on life support system, Guna Superintendent of Police Sanjeev Sinha told PTI.

"Sorry to say, he is no more," Guna district chief medical and health officer Dr Rajkumar Rishishwar told reporters at the hospital.

"The child was in the narrow borewell for the entire night in the chilly weather. His hands and feet were drenched and swollen. His clothes were also wet and mud was found in his mouth," he said.

Doctors examined whether the body parts froze due to hypothermia (a condition that occurs when the core body temperature drops below 95 degrees Fahrenheit, he said.

The boy was trapped at a depth of 39 feet in the borewell, which is around 140-feet deep, Guna Collector Satendra Singh said on Saturday.

Borewell did not strike water, and hence no casing had been put on, he said. *—PTI*

Law will take its course in theatre stampede case: Telangana DGP

HYDERABAD, 29 DEC

PHOTO: X

The regular bail petition filed by the actor, who was named as accused no 11, has been posted by a local court to 30 December **PHOTO: X**

Telangana DGP Jitender said on Sunday that law would take its own course in the case related to the death of a woman in a stampede here during the premiere show of the blockbuster film 'Pushpa 2'.

Actor of the film Allu Arjun, is an accused in this case.

Reacting to a query during a year-end press conference here, the top police officer, however, refused to elaborate much, saying the matter is sub judice.

"The case is already under investigation. The court is also looking into this. It is sub judice also. Moreover, law will take its own course. This is what I have to say. Nothing more," Jitender said.

A 35-year-old woman died and her eight-year-old son was injured on December 4 during a stampede-like situation at the Sandhya Theatre in Hyderabad when fans jostled to have a glimpse of the actor at the premiere of 'Pushpa 2' movie.

Following the incident, the city police registered a case against Allu Arjun, his security team, and the theatre management under different sections of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) at the Chikkadpally police station based on the complaint lodged by the deceased woman's family.

The regular bail petition filed by the actor, who was named as accused no 11, has been posted by a local court to 30 December. *—PTI*

'Arunachal's Siang project will counter flood risk from China'

ITANAGAR, 29 DEC

PHOTO: PTI

- The dam is to be built at a huge gorge in Himalayan reaches where Brahmaputra makes a huge U-turn to flow into Arunachal

Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu said the Centre's Rs 1.13 lakh crore Siang Upper Multipurpose Project (SUMP) was not only for generating electricity but also to maintain the natural flow of the river throughout the year and mitigate risks of flooding if China released excess water.

Khandu's remarks came in the wake of China approving the construction of the world's largest dam, at a cost of USD 137 billion, on the Brahmaputra river in Tibet close to the Indian border.

The dam is to be built at a huge gorge in the Himalayan reaches where River Brahmaputra makes a huge U-turn to flow into Arunachal Pradesh and then to Bangladesh.

"The SUMP, with an estimated installed capacity of 11,000MW, is not just about generating power, but also about maintaining the natural flow of River Siang and mitigating potential flood risks from water releases by China," Khandu said.

Describing SUMP as a project of national importance, Khandu said hydropower generation is only the secondary goal of it. "The real objective of the project is to save the River Siang and the communities that have depended on it for generations," he said.

The survey for pre-feasibility report of the projects is being delayed by stiff opposition from people fearing displacement, loss of livelihoods and the environmental impact of the mega dam. *—PTI*

Gujarat: 4 die after inhaling toxic gas at chemical unit

BHARUCH, 29 DEC

Four workers died on Sunday after inhaling toxic fumes following gas leakage at a chemical plant at Dahej in Gujarat's Bharuch district, police said.

The victims fell unconscious after inhaling the toxic fumes leaking from a pipe at a production unit of the Gujarat Fluorochemicals Limited (GFL) around 10pm on Saturday, Dahej Police Inspector BM Patidar said. All four of them died in the hospital, he said.

"The incident occurred at around 10pm in the company's CMS plant," Patidar said, adding that the bodies were sent for autopsy, and a probe into the incident was underway.

Police identified the deceased as Rajesh Kumar (Gujarat), Mudrika Yadav (Jharkhand), Sushit Prasad and Mahesh Nandlal. GFL, Dahej, Deputy General Manager Jignesh Parmar said the company will investigate the matter and a compensation of Rs 25 lakh will be paid to the kin of each of deceased workers. *—PTI*

Malayalam actor Dileep Shankar found dead in hotel

T'PURAM, 29 DEC

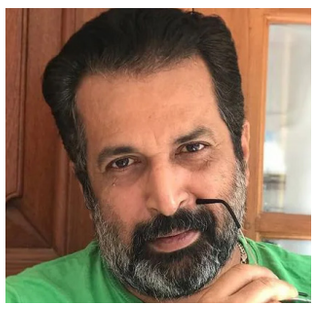


PHOTO: X

Renowned Malayalam film and television actor Dileep Shankar has passed away. He was found dead in a hotel room in Thiruvananthapuram on Sunday.

As per Cantonment Police, Dileep, who is known for his roles in popular serials like Amma Ariyathe, Sundari, and Panchagni, had checked into the hotel four days ago to work on a serial project.

His co-stars had called the actor on the phone but could not reach him. Following this, hotel staff and his colleagues entered his room, where they found him dead.

Forensic experts have examined the scene, and the exact cause of death will be determined following a post-mortem examination.

Also, according to the police's initial evaluation, there are no unnatural factors involved in the actor's death.

After the news broke out, fans and several members of the film industry expressed shock on social media.

A native of Ernakulam, Dileep Shankar has been part of several popular Malayalam shows. He has played important roles in serials like Amma Iriathe, Panchagni and Sundari. *—ANI*

UP archaeology dept mulls taking over Manhar Kheda Fort

MUZAFFARNAGAR, 29 DEC

Uttar Pradesh Archaeological Department is reviewing a proposal to take over the historic Manhar Kheda Fort in Shali district's Jalalabad on the recommendations of its advisory committee, officials said on Sunday.

"The department had sought revenue documents from district authorities to proceed with the proposal. The relevant documents have been forwarded to the Archaeological Department," Shamli Sub-Magistrate Hamid told.

The fort, currently inhabited by several families, also houses the residence of Rashtriya Lok Dal's Thana Bhawan constituency MLA Ashraf Ali.

Demands for the fort to be declared a national heritage site were spearheaded by activists from Vishva Hindu Parishad. *—PTI*

Security Forces with Ten MQ-81 Chinese Origin Assault Rifles and Type 81 assault rifles **PHOTO: X**

Chinese-origin assault rifles seized in Arunachal

ITANAGAR, 29 DEC

A large number of Chinese-origin assault rifles were recovered in Arunachal Pradesh's Changlang district, a defence spokesperson said on Sunday.

The recovery was made in a joint operation carried out by the Army and Assam Rifles, in coordination with district police, using specialist drones, tracker dogs and metal detectors, he said.

Ten MQ-81 Chinese-origin assault rifles and Type 81 assault rifles were recovered from different locations in 27 Mile along the Miao-Vijaynagar Road in the Namdapha National Park and Tiger Reserve, defence spokesperson said. *—PTI*

IN 2024

Mollywood suffered at least ₹650 cr loss

T'PURAM, 29 DEC

Of the 199 new films released in theatres, for which the industry spent around Rs 1,000 crore, only 26 films got profit of Rs 300–350 cr **PHOTO: X**

- The producers felt the production cost of movies should be brought down

Though Mollywood has produced a few blockbusters that received a pan-Indian release and reaped huge profit in 2024, only 26 of the 204 films released in the year got a rewarding collection, revealed figures released by the Kerala Film Producers Association.

"Of the 199 new films and five remastered versions of earlier productions released in theatres, for which the industry spent around Rs 1,000 crore, only 26 films got a profit Rs 300–350 crore from theatres," said KFPA secretary A Rakesh.

The figures meant that the industry suffered a loss of Rs 650–700 crore, he said, adding that all the stakeholders, including actors, should keep strict financial discipline to sustain the Malayalam cinema industry, Rakesh said.

The KFPA secretary said more than 200 films were released in 2023 also, most of which received the same fate in theatres.

Asked about the turnover from OTT platforms he said not many films could make it to the OTT as most of them were bought based on theatre collection. He said the association arrived at the figures based on the estimates given by producers, which will be approximately close to the actual costs involved in filmmaking.

The producers felt the production cost of movies should be brought down, and without financial prudence, the industry couldn't sustain.

The increasing remuneration of actors is posing a threat to the producers who cannot control their expenses and the former should come forward to cooperate with the producers to run the industry better, Rakesh said. *—PTI*

Maha Kumbh 2025: Aerial, underwater drones deployed

MAHAKUMBH NAGAR, 29 DEC

The upcoming Maha Kumbh will feature unprecedented security measures with the deployment of drones capable of monitoring 100 metres underwater and 120 metres above ground, officials said.

More than 45 crore pilgrims are expected to participate in the grand gathering.

In a first for Uttar Pradesh, underwater drones will be deployed in the Sangam area while tethered drones will make a debut in the skies during one of the largest religious congregations on the planet between 13 January and 26 February, 2025.

The anti-drone system, first deployed during the consecration ceremony at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya this year, will also be deployed during the Maha Kumbh.

UP government earlier last week said a detailed security apparatus has been put in place to ensure the safety of every individual during the Sangam Snan (bathing at the confluence).

The underwater drones, expected to provide round-the-clock surveillance, can function effectively in low-light conditions.

With the ability to operate at a depth of up to 100 meters, these drones are capable of providing accurate information under any circumstances, said a police officer.

Inspector General of Police (Eastern Zone, Prayagraj) Rajeev Narayan Mishra launched a high-speed underwater drone recently.

"This drone can dive up to 100 metres and transmit real-time activity reports to the command centre," the officer said. *—PTI*

ANTI-GOVT PROTEST

Demonstrators carrying Georgian national and EU flags march during an anti-government rally outside the Parliament building in Tbilisi, Georgia. They formed a human chain of unity on the eve of former soccer player Mikheil Kavelashvili's presidential inauguration. Protests have persisted in Georgia for over a month, following the government's decision to downgrade ties with the EU after the European Parliament criticised irregularities in the country's late October Parliamentary elections
PHOTO: PTI

Rohingya refugees struggle for children's future

Aisha, a 7-year-old Rohingya girl, wakes up every morning chasing her elder sister Asma as the latter gets ready for school in Khajuri Khas, a locality in northeastern Delhi.

Aisha pleads with her elder sister to take her along most days, but her wish is never met. She was denied admission to the same school where her sister studies in seventh grade.

Their father, Hussain Ahmad, a Rohingya refugee who fled Myanmar with his family in 2017, struggles to explain to Aisha why the school authorities have refused her enrollment.

It pains him to see her plead — a constant reminder of the hurdles they face.

"I have been running from one public school to another to get my daughter admitted, but she has been denied everywhere," said Ahmad, a construction worker. "They are depriving her of education. I feel very helpless."

Ahmad said he had submitted all the necessary documents, including United Nations documentation, required for refugee children's enrollment in school. However, the school authorities have stopped considering these papers for admission.

For the past two years, Ahmad said, "authorities have started demanding Indian documents like Aadhaar (a biometric identity card), which we, as refugees, don't possess. Our United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) card has become useless," referring to the document issued by the UN refugee agency.

Ahmad's experience resembles those of other Rohingya families in Khajuri Khas. A few meters from his home, Sarwar Kamal, another Rohingya refugee who works as a mobile repair technician, has been making rounds of government schools in the area to secure admission for his 10-year-old daughter.

Around 40 Rohingya families have lived in this colony ever since they fled persecution in Myanmar. An estimated 40,000 Rohingya people live in India,

An estimated 40,000 Rohingya people live in India. Most fled Myanmar in 2017, when the Southeast Asian nation's military unleashed a violent crackdown
PHOTO: PTI

with 20,000 of them registered with the UNHCR. Most fled Myanmar in 2017, when the Southeast Asian nation's military unleashed a violent crackdown in what many describe as a genocide against the Rohingya Muslims in western Rakhine state.

India does not have a national policy on refugees and considers the Rohingya to be "illegal foreigners." India is one of the few countries that is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention.

Atishi Marlena, the Chief Minister of Delhi, has accused BJP-led government of settling "a large number of illegal Rohingyas" across the capital.

Sabber Kyaw Min, the founder of the Rohingya Human Rights Initiative, is alarmed by the politicisation of the Rohingya issue. Min said this kind of political narrative targeting Rohingyas is adding to the fears of an already marginalized community.

"This education ban is politically motivated. The leaders of different political parties are portraying us as an enemy for their politics," Min told DW. At least 676 Rohingya people are currently being held in immigration detention centers across India, according to a 2024 report by Azadi Project and Refugees International.

In Khajuri Khas, children who are unable to attend regular schools have joined an alternative school — a small religious seminary established by Mohmmad Syed, a Rohingya refugee.

"I stepped in when I learned our children are being denied education. These Rohingya students have dreams of having a good life but they are being discriminated for who they are," said Syed.

Vinod Kumar Sharma, the principal of the school that refused admission to Aisha, said his school cannot be blamed, as the authorities have set the rules for admitting refugee children. In Haryana, Rohingya children are being denied admission to schools after seventh grade.

Emanuel Mohd, a community leader in the Nuh camp, has started offering free tuition for 90 students who have been denied admission in schools.

In October, the Delhi High Court refused to hear a plea to enroll Rohingya children in local government schools. The court noted that since the Rohingya have not been legally granted entry into India, the matter falls under the purview of India's Home Ministry.

Ashok Agarwal, the lawyer who filed the petition, was disappointed with the court's decision. He stressed that the Indian constitution guarantees education as a fundamental right to every child in the country, irrespective of their citizenship status. Agarwal is challenging the High Court decision in the Supreme Court, and hopes the top court will soon set a date for hearing the case. *—DW News*

SALAR

Carbon removal tech is key to climate stability

Global carbon emissions from fossil fuels continue to rise and 2024 is likely to be the world's hottest year on record.

It's becoming increasingly clear that limiting global warming to 1.5°C will require much more than existing efforts to reduce emissions and decarbonise industry. We also need to remove enormous amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, 7-9 billion tonnes a year.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says carbon dioxide removal technology will be required to achieve global and national net zero targets. In other words, there is no net zero without CO2-removal, because emissions of greenhouse gases are not declining anywhere near fast enough.

There will be trade-offs, as CO2-removal can be costly and often uses up energy, water and land. But Earth is hurtling towards a climate catastrophe, with more than 3°C of warming under current global policies. We must do everything we can to avert disaster, which means slashing emissions as much as we possibly can, and removing what's left.

Carbon dioxide removal accelerates natural processes such as storing carbon in trees, rocks, soil and the ocean. It differs from carbon capture and storage, which seeks to remove carbon before it enters the atmosphere.

As Australia's Climate Change Authority states, reaching the national goal of net-zero emissions by 2050 does not mean all emissions are eliminated across the economy. Some emissions are likely to remain – about 25 per cent of Australia's 2005 emissions under the current plan – and they need to be dealt with. So how much carbon dioxide are we talking about? Some 133 million tonnes a year by mid-century, according to the authority. This equates to billions of tonnes of additional carbon dioxide removal over the next 25 years.

Ways to remove and store carbon dioxide from the atmosphere are among the federal government's national science and research priorities. The international scientific community divides carbon dioxide removal technologies into "conventional" (nature-based) and "novel" (new) approaches.

The conventional technologies rely on biological processes, such as planting trees, boosting soil carbon levels and increasing carbon stores in coastal ecosystems such as mangroves. The carbon is typically stored over shorter timescales, from a decade to a century. Many of these natural carbon stores or "sinks" are already becoming saturated. They will also become increasingly vulnerable in a changing climate. For example, forest fires are releasing billions of tonnes of carbon dioxide back into the atmosphere annually. To reach net zero emissions, the world will need to find more durable ways to remove CO2 at scale from the atmosphere. This is where the new technologies come in.

Concerningly, novel approaches currently comprise less than 0.1 per cent of total global carbon dioxide removal.

In a market worth as much as USD1.1 trillion dollars by 2050, there's always a risk of overstating the benefits.

To counter this, the IPCC is developing evidence-based methods to ensure the amounts of carbon removed can be verified and included in national accounts. This should promote transparency and reduce the risk of greenwashing or making misleading claims.

Carbon dioxide removal can also affect the environment. For instance, some approaches such as tree planting may compete with agriculture or biodiversity conservation for water and land. This challenge is compounded by climate change.

Other approaches, such as direct air capture and storage, currently face technical challenges in extracting CO2 from air without consuming high amounts of energy.

A global survey of Indigenous people in 30 countries around the world, including Australia, found positive attitudes to climate intervention technologies. However, this is only a starting point. Greater engagement is needed nationally concerning specific carbon dioxide removal approaches.

Australia's large land mass and vast oceans mean we have far greater physical capacity than other nations to store carbon. Much like solar and wind energy, tackling carbon dioxide removal in Australia at the scale required will require a new industry with its own infrastructure, institutions and processes.

Of course, prevention is better than cure. It's always better to cut emissions and stop carbon dioxide entering the atmosphere in the first place, than trying to remove it afterwards. But time is running out, carbon dioxide levels are already too high and we need to reach net zero by 2050. *—PTI*

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change says carbondioxide removal technology will be required to achieve global and national net zero targets
PHOTO: PTI

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

In 2024, India tackled geopolitical challenges with resolve

In a year marked by geopolitical tensions and turbulence, India and China ended an over four-and-a-half-year border standoff and announced steps to reduce mistrust even as New Delhi faced fresh challenges after deposed Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Hasina fled the country in the face of a mass movement against her rule.

At the fag end of the year, New Delhi was readying its approach in dealing with US president-elect Donald Trump's second term amid fears that his policy approach relating to trade and tariff may have profound implications for international trade.

Washington has been pressing India to take action against Indians allegedly involved in a foiled plot to assassinate pro-Khalistan separatist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun in New York last year.

In November last year, US federal prosecutors charged Indian national Nikhil Gupta of working with an Indian government employee in the plot.

The relations between India and Canada sharply nosedived in the second half of the year after Ottawa linked several Indian diplomats including High Commissioner Sanjay Verma to the murder of Khalistani separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

India strongly rejected the charges and recalled Verma even as the Canadian government said Indian diplomats were expelled. India expelled acting Canadian High Commissioner Stewart Wheeler and five other diplomats following Canada's allegations.

However, the end of the military faceoff between India and China along the Line of Actual Control in eastern Ladakh was the high point in the foreign policy domain.

A brutal clash at Galwan Valley in June 2020 that killed 20 Indian soldiers and an unspecified number of Chinese soldiers took relations between the two nuclear-armed neighbours to their lowest point in six decades.

Following an understanding reached on 21 October, the two sides completed the disengagement of troops at the two remaining friction points of Demchok and Depsang.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping held talks on the margins of the BRICS Summit in Russia on 23 October and agreed to revive various bilateral dialogue mechanisms, signalling an intention to normalise the relations.

In the nearly 50-minute meeting, Modi underscored the importance of properly handling differences and disputes and not allowing them to disturb peace and tranquillity in border areas.

The military standoff between India and China along the Line of Actual Control ended with troop disengagement at Demchok and Depsang, marking a key foreign policy achievement
PHOTO: PTI

India's National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and China's foreign minister Wang Yi discussed on "positive" direction for cross-border cooperation including resuming the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra, river data sharing and border trade.

There were indications of some positive approach in India-Pakistan relations as External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar travelled to Islamabad in October to attend a summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

It was the first such visit from India to Pakistan in nearly a decade that came amid frosty ties between the two neighbours.

However, India's relations with Bangladesh also came under severe strain after deposed prime minister Hasina fled the country in the face of a massive anti-government protest that ended her nearly 16-year rule.

Hasina, 77, has been living in India since 5 August.

The relations nosedived dramatically after the interim government headed by Muhammad Yunus failed to contain attacks on minorities, especially Hindus, in that country. This month, the Yunus-government sent a diplomatic note to New Delhi seeking extradition of Hasina, a move that may further strain the ties. Following insistence of Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu, India withdrew all its military personnel from the Maldives, a key island nation for New Delhi in the Indian Ocean.

In June, top leaders from India's neighbourhood and the Indian Ocean region including Muizzu, Nepal Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' and Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe graced the swearing-in ceremony of Prime Minister Modi.

In his first foreign trip after becoming the prime minister for a third straight term, Modi travelled to Moscow in July.

In his meeting with President Vladimir Putin, Modi told him that a solution to the Ukraine conflict is not possible on the battlefield and peace efforts do not succeed in the midst of bombs and bullets.

Modi's visit to Russia triggered some criticism in the West as the trip came amid global outrage over a Russian missile strike on a children's hospital in Kyiv.

In August, Modi travelled to Ukrane and conveyed to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy that both Ukraine and Russia should sit together without wasting time to end the ongoing war and that India was ready to play an "active role" to restore peace in the region. Modi's nearly nine-hour visit to Ukraine was the first by an Indian prime minister since its independence in 1991.

In February, Qatar released eight jailed former Indian Navy personnel and seven of them returned home.

It was seen as a major diplomatic victory for India that came nearly three-and-half months after a Qatari court handed them death sentence.

India also focused on improving regional connectivity with countries in its neighbourhood as well as with several central Asian nations. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Air Canada flight catches fire on landing

OTTAWA, 29 DEC

A plane faced severe landing difficulties at Canada's Halifax Stanfield International Airport, resulting in a partial fire and evacuation on 29 December. The Air Canada Express flight, operated by PAL Airlines, arrived from Newfoundland around 9.30 PM local time when its landing gear failed. A passenger described the plane tilting at a 20-degree angle, with its wing skidding along the pavement, as reported by CBC News. Emergency services swiftly responded, safely evacuating all passengers and crew to a hangar for medical checks. The aircraft, with a capacity of 80 passengers, was nearly full, though exact numbers remain unconfirmed. This coincided with a fatal Jeju Air crash in South Korea, which claimed 179 lives. *—Agencies*

Russia to halt gas supplies to Moldova from Jan

MOSCOW, 29 DEC

Gazprom announced that it will reduce natural gas supplies to Moldova to zero starting 1 January, 2025, citing contract violations and the Moldovan government's failure to settle debts for gas deliveries, state agency TASS reported.The Russian energy company said it had notified Moldovagaz, one of the largest enterprises in the energy sector in the country, on Saturday about Moldova's repeated failure to meet payment obligations under the current contract, which constitutes a breach of its terms. "Based on the provisions of the contract and applicable norms of Russian legislation, PJSC Gazprom will introduce a restriction on natural gas supplies to the Republic of Moldova to 0 cubic metres per day from 8.00 am on 1 January," the Russian company said.*—ANI*

41 people fall ill from 'irritant gas' in Germany

BERLIN, 29 DEC

In an alarming incident in Waldheim, Saxony, 41 customers at a supermarket fell ill after inhaling what has been described as "irritant gas." As shoppers went about their grocery shopping on Saturday, an unknown individual reportedly sprayed a noxious substance inside the store, leading to widespread respiratory issues including shortness of breath. Fifteen affected individuals were hospitalised for treatment, while emergency services, including fire trucks, ambulances, and police, rapidly responded to the scene. The German Red Cross was also deployed to assist. The supermarket was subsequently closed as authorities began investigation. *—DW News*

Taiwan reports 5 Chinese aircraft near territory

TAIPEI, 29 DEC

Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence (MND) on Sunday reported the presence of five Chinese military aircraft and five naval vessels operating near the island. In a post shared on X, the MND stated, "Five PLA aircraft and five PLAN vessels operating around Taiwan were detected up until 6am (UTC+8) today. Three of the aircraft crossed the median line and entered Taiwan's northern and southwestern ADIZ. We have monitored the situation and responded accordingly." Military activity was also reported on Saturday when seven Chinese military aircraft and five naval vessels were around its territory. NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte also criticised China's stance and said that "China is bullying Taiwan, and pursuing access to critical infrastructure in ways that could cripple societies. *—ANI*

Musk pledges to 'go to war' for H-1B visa programme

Trump backs Musk, calling H-1B visa programme vital for US

WASHINGTON DC, 29 DEC

Tesla CEO Elon Musk tapped by Donald Trump to lead his Department of Government Efficiency argued last week that foreign workers are needed for tech companies like SpaceX and Tesla *PHOTO: X@ELONMUSK*

Tesla CEO Elon Musk has received support from US president-elect Donald Trump on his stance on H-1B visas, a day after the tech billionaire vowed to "go to war" to defend the programme used to bring skilled foreign workers to the US.

Musk, who along with Indian-American tech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy has been tapped by Trump to lead his Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), argued last week that foreign workers are needed for tech companies like Musk's SpaceX and Tesla.

Musk on Friday blasted a user on X who used a video of Musk discussing SpaceX processes to go after the billionaire's stance on the visa programme.

"The reason I'm in America along with so many critical people who built SpaceX, Tesla and hundreds of other companies that made America strong is because of H1B," Musk wrote on X.

He also used a profane quote from Tom Cruise's character in the movie "Tropic Thunder" to attack his critics.

"Take a big step back and F*** YOURSELF in the face," Musk said.

Trump sided with Musk, saying he fully backs the programme opposed by some of his supporters. "I've always liked the visas; I have always been in favour of the visas. That's why we have them," Trump told the New York Post newspaper.

"I have many H-1B visas on my properties. I've been a believer in H-1B. I have used it many times. It's a great programme," Trump said.

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China. Trump's supporters have been pushing for scrapping the H-1B visa programme amid debate over immigration. The debate sparked when Laura Loomer, a right-wing influencer, criticised Trump's selection of Indian-American entrepreneur Sriram Krishnan as an adviser on artificial intelligence policy in his coming administration.

Musk called for removing "contemptible fools" from the Republican Party who oppose his immigration agenda. *—PTI*

N Korea declares tough strategy against US

SEOUL, 29 DEC

PHOTO: PTI

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said he will implement the "toughest" anti-US policy, less than a month before Donald Trump takes office as US president, the country's state media reported Sunday.

Trump's return to the White House raises prospects for high-profile diplomacy with North Korea. During his first term, Trump met Kim three times for talks on the North's nuclear programme.

Many experts however say a quick resumption of Kim-Trump summitry is unlikely as Trump would first focus on conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East. North Korea's support for Russia's war against Ukraine also poses a challenge to efforts to revive diplomacy, experts say.

Kim called the US "the most reactionary state that regards anti-communism as its invariable state policy." Kim said that the US-South Korea-Japan security partnership is expanding into "a nuclear military bloc for aggression."

"This reality clearly shows to which direction we should advance and what we should do and how," Kim said, according to the official Korean Central News Agency.

It said Kim's speech "clarified the strategy for the toughest anti-US counteraction to be launched aggressively" by North Korea for its long-term national interests and security.

KCNA didn't elaborate on the anti-US strategy. But it said Kim set forth tasks to bolster military capability through defence technology advancements and stressed the need to improve the mental toughness of North Korean soldiers.

The previous meetings between Trump and Kim had not only put an end to their exchanges of fiery rhetoric and threats of destruction, but they developed personal connections.

Trump once famously said he and Kim "fell in love." But their talks eventually collapsed in 2019, as they wrangled over US-led sanctions on the North. *—PTI*

240 terrorists arrested in Gaza Hospital: IDF

People mourn over the bodies of five Palestinian journalists who were killed by an Israeli airstrike in Gaza *PHOTO: PTI*

JERUSALEM/RAMALLAH, 29 DEC

The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) have arrested over 240 terrorist operatives, including key Hamas members, during a military operation at Gaza's Kamal Adwan Hospital.

The operation, launched on Friday, targeted terrorist infrastructure and operatives, with several suspects attempting to pose as patients or escape using ambulances. In a post on X, the IDF noted, "More than 240 Hamas, Islamic Jihad terrorists, and other operatives suspected of terrorist activities were apprehended, some of whom attempted to pose as patients or flee using ambulances."

The operation also led to the arrest of approximately 15 terrorists who infiltrated Israel during the 7 October attacks, along with Hamas engineering and anti-tank missile operatives, who were taken in for questioning.

In a significant development, the IDF reported that the director of Kamal Adwan Hospital, "suspected of being a Hamas terrorist operative," was also taken in for questioning.

The IDF stated that it's special forces conducted precise activities inside the hospital, locating and confiscating weapons, including grenades, guns, munitions, and military equipment. Meanwhile, a Palestinian woman was shot and killed in her home in the volatile northern West Bank town of Jenin, where the Palestinian Authority is carrying out a rare campaign against militants.

The family of Shatha al-Sabbagh, a 22-year-old journalism student, said she was killed by a sniper with the Palestinian security forces late Saturday while she was with her mother and two small children. They said there were no militants in the area at the time.

The security forces condemned the shooting and vowed to probe it. *—ANI*

China extends n-butanol tariffs on US, Taiwan, Malaysia

BEIJING, 29 DEC

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

In a significant escalation of trade tensions, China has announced the extension of tariffs on n-butanol imports from the United States, Taiwan, and Malaysia. This measure, effective immediately, will see anti-dumping duties maintained for an additional five years, as confirmed by the Ministry of Commerce (MoC).

The decision follows a sunset review initiated in December 2023 at the request of domestic producers, which assessed the potential harm to China's n-butanol industry should the duties be lifted. The review concluded that removing the tariffs could reignite dumping practices that would adversely affect local manufacturers.

Since 2018, China has maintained anti-dumping measures on n-butanol, following an investigation that concluded dumping from these countries had indeed caused substantial damage to the domestic industry. The Ministry of Commerce reiterated that the extended duties would mirror those established in 2018.

n-Butanol is a crucial organic chemical used extensively in the production of downstream products including butyl acrylate and butyl acetate, as well as applications in coatings, adhesives, and plasticisers. Its role as an organic solvent and extractant further underscores its significance in various industrial processes.

In a broader context, China's recent actions include imposing sanctions on seven US companies, citing security concerns, and signalling a potential halt to semiconductor purchases from the US, thus deepening the ongoing trade rift between the two nations. *—ANI*

Pak soldier killed, 11 wounded in Taliban firing

ISLAMABAD, 29 DEC

A clash at the Pakistan-Afghanistan border has resulted in the death of a Frontier Constabulary (FC) soldier, with 11 others injured, following an unprovoked attack by Afghan Taliban forces. The incident occurred on Saturday morning in the Upper Kurram district, where Afghan troops opened fire on multiple Pakistani border posts, including Ghozgarhi, Matha Sangar, Kot Ragha, and Tari Mengal, utilising both light and heavy weaponry.

Pakistani forces retaliated, reportedly inflicting significant casualties on the Afghan side, with sources indicating that seven to eight Afghan personnel were killed during the exchange. The altercation comes just days after Pakistan conducted strikes against positions of the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban in Paktika province, following a infiltration attempt by militants using Taliban-controlled posts to cross into Pakistan. *—PTI*

Blake Lively; Justin Baldoni *PHOTO: X*

Sexual harassment: Baldoni to countersue Blake Lively

WASHINGTON, 29 DEC

Actor and director Justin Baldoni is set to file a countersuit against Blake Lively after she recently launched a legal complaint alleging sexual harassment and a smear campaign against him during the production of 'It Ends with Us'. Baldoni's attorney, Bryan Freedman, intends to file the counter-complaint when the courts reopen following the New Year break, claiming it will "shock everyone" and reveal the truth behind Lively's allegations.

Freedman charges that Lively's accusations are unfounded and part of an effort to rehabilitate her public image, suggesting that her publicist, Leslie Sloane, orchestrated a campaign to tarnish Baldoni's reputation. It claims that WhatsApp messages have been misrepresented to distort their meaning and accuses Lively's team of planting damaging stories in the press.

Lively has received considerable backing from colleagues including her 'Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants' co-stars—America Ferrera, Amber Tamblyn, and Alexis Bledel—who expressed their solidarity in a joint Instagram post. They condemned the alleged attempts to discredit Lively and highlighted the troubling implications for women seeking safe work environments. *—ANI*

Mojtaba Shahid *PHOTO: X*

Suicide bomber kills police officer in Iran

TEHRAN, 29 DEC

A suicide bomber killed a local police officer and wounded another in a southern Iranian port city, home to a large Sunni Muslim community, local media said Sunday.The hard-line Javan Daily, a newspaper close to the country's powerful Revolutionary Guard, said the attacker stopped Capt. Mojtaba Shahid's car on Saturday evening in Bandar Lengeh in the province of Hormozgan before detonating his vest. Shahid's deputy, who was also in the car, has been hospitalized in critical condition, the paper reported, describing the attack as an act of terrorism.The city, some 1,000 kilometres south of the capital Tehran, has no recent history of militancy. No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, but some local news outlets claimed Ansar al-Furqan, an Al-Qaeda-linked Sunni militant group, was behind it. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

71,000 WITHOUT POWER

2 dead as tornadoes strike Texas & Mississippi

HOUSTON, 29 DEC

Reports suggest six tornadoes touched down in the Houston, with possibility of more being identified as damage assessments progress *PHOTO: X*

At least two people were confirmed dead and six others injured on Saturday as multiple tornadoes wreaked havoc across Texas and Mississippi, damaging homes and overturning vehicles.

Authorities reported one fatality in the Liverpool area, situated south of Houston, where four additional individuals sustained injuries deemed non-critical, according to Madison Polston, spokesperson for the Brazoria County Sheriff's Office. She noted that officials had identified around ten homes suffering damage in the region, but assessments were ongoing to determine the full extent.

In Mississippi, a separate death was reported in Adams County, along with two injuries in Franklin County, as confirmed by the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency. The National Weather Service indicated that two tornadoes hit areas around Bude and the city of Brandon, removing roofs from several buildings.

Preliminary reports suggest at least six tornadoes touched down in the Houston area, with the possibility of more being identified as damage assessments progress. Both tornadoes and straight-line winds contributed to the extensive damage throughout the region. Storms also disrupted air travel, causing delays at Houston's main airports—Bush Intercontinental and Hobby. Around 71,000 utility customers were left without power in Mississippi, with that number expected to increase. Emergency teams continued to focus on safety and accounting for residents, with comprehensive damage assessments anticipated to begin early Sunday. *—PTI*

Syria's embassy halts ops amid Lebanon officers' move

BEIRUT, 29 DEC

- Tensions persist between Kurdish groups and Turkish-backed armed factions, while Kurdish women's groups have initiated protests demanding representation

The Syrian embassy in Lebanon halted its consular services on Saturday, a day after two relatives of ousted President Bashar Assad were detained at Beirut airport for allegedly possessing forged passports.

The embassy announced the suspension on, stating it was "until further notice" on the orders of Syria's foreign ministry, but did not clarify the reasons behind it. Two Lebanese security officials, speaking anonymously, indicated that the passports in question belonged to Assad's wife and daughter of a cousin, and were believed to have been counterfeited at the embassy. Notably, Assad's uncle, Rifaat Assad, reportedly traveled out of the country successfully with his legitimate passport prior to this incident.

Lebanese authorities reportedly transferred 70 Syrians, back to the newly-established Syrian government headed by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. In northeastern Syria, tensions persist between Kurdish groups and Turkish-backed armed factions, while Kurdish women's groups have initiated protests demanding representation and rights in the new governance structure amid concerns about potential Islamist influences. *—PTI*

CCI Chief: AI risks cartels; fair growth vital

NEW DELHI, 29 DEC

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the potential to aid cartelisation by automating collusive behaviour through predictive algorithms, Competition Commission chief Ravneet Kaur has said, asserting that the watchdog is focused on developing ecosystems that ensure algorithmic transparency and accountability while promoting innovation. The Competition Commission of India (CCI), which works to curb unfair business practices in the market place, has commenced the study on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and competition that is expected to be completed by mid-2025. The study will look at various elements, including AI in the area of logistics and algorithms in general. In 2023-24, CCI received 50 anti-trust information, passed prima-facie orders with respect to alleged anti-competitive conduct in 33 matters, and "approved/ disposed of" 101 combinations. *—PTI*

Foodgrain output set to scale new peak in 2025

NEW DELHI, 29 DEC

India is poised to achieve new heights in foodgrain production in 2025, driven by favourable monsoon, though significant challenges persist in pulses and oilseeds production as the country's agricultural sector shows signs of robust recovery. The Agriculture Ministry's initial projections paint an optimistic picture, with kharif (summer) foodgrain production estimated at a record 164.7 million tonnes for the 2024-25 crop year ending June 2025. Winter crop planting has maintained steady progress, with wheat sown across 29.31 million hectares as of mid-December 2024, while total rabi (winter) crops cover 55.88 million hectares. The agricultural sector is projected to bounce back strongly, with growth projections of 3.5-4 per cent in 2024-25. *—PTI*

Section of Akasa Air pilots seeks detailed DGCA audit

MUMBAI, 29 DEC

Resentment among a section of Akasa Air pilots continued allegedly over training issues with these pilots seeking a detailed DGCA audit of the airline a day after the regulator ordered suspension of two senior airline officials for certain lapses, according to a communication. In a detailed communication to the civil aviation ministry and the DGCA on Saturday, the section of pilots has also mentioned that they are in the process of forming a pilots' union at the airline. Queries to Akasa Air on this issue remained unanswered. According to the communication, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has served 10 showcause notices to the airline in recent weeks for various alleged lapses. On 27 December, the DGCA ordered the suspension of Akasa Air's directors of operations and training for six months for training lapses. *—PTI*

Ultraviolette eyes rapid commercial operations in 2025

NEW DELHI, 29 DEC

Electric premium motorcycle maker Ultraviolette is scaling up its commercial operations, targetting monthly sales of 1,000 units a month by the second half of 2025 while also gearing up to enter European and other international markets next year, according to top company officials. The company plans to increase its sales network to 30 cities next year from 12 cities at present, having put in place the technology base for its product and validated through real-world testing, Ultraviolette CTO and co-founder Niraj Rajmohan told PTI. When asked about the volume target, Rajmohan said the company's objective is to clock about 1,000 units a month by the second half of 2025. So far, the company has sold a total of 1,000 units of its F77 Mach 2 electric bike. *—PTI*

Rupee tumbles 3% in 2024, slow recovery ahead

There are concerns over slower growth, green buck's strength

MUMBAI, 29 DEC

The Indian rupee tumbled 3 per cent in 2024 as concerns over slower economic growth and the green buck's global strength weighed, but it was among the least volatile currencies in the world and the headwinds may be less intense in the coming year.

Rupee settled at new lows as the year closed as dollar's resurgence weighed on emerging-market currencies.

The action-packed 2024 continued to impact the rupee's exchange rate against major currencies throughout, with a series of geopolitical events ranging from the Russia-Ukraine war and crisis in the Middle East to trade disruptions in the Red Sea and elections across several major economies.

Global factors, including measures taken by major central banks, have hit not only the rupee-dollar dynamics but also disrupted the exchange rates of currencies across all emerging economies.

Rupee settled at new lows as the year closed as dollar's resurgence weighed on emerging-market currencies *PHOTO: PTI*

In fact, the rupee's fall with respect to the dollar has been less than its depreciation in terms of other currencies. And it has ended up with gains compared to euro and the Japanese yen.

Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) ex-governor Shaktikanta Das also said in the central bank's December bi-monthly monetary policy that the Indian rupee has remained less volatile compared to its peers in emerging markets.

It breached the crucial 84 level on 10 October, surpassed Rs 85-a-dollar mark on 19 December and even touched the life-time low of 85.80 during intra-day on 27 December, recording the steepest single-day fall in nearly two years.

However, the local unit has witnessed a gain of 8.7 per cent against yen rising from the rate of Rs 58.99 per 100 yen on 1 January to Rs 54.26 on 27 December.

President-elect Donald Trump's declared intention to raise tariffs on Chinese imports spooked currency traders worldwide, triggering an unabated chase for the greenback, leading to the mass exodus of foreign capital from Indian equity markets.

India's economic growth, projected at 6.5-7.5 per cent for 2025, could support the rupee, while monetary easing by the RBI to stimulate growth could hit the currency adversely. *—PTI*

HDFC, RIL BIGGEST GAINERS

Mcap of 6 of top 10 most valued firms climbs ₹86,847.88 cr

NEW DELHI, 29 DEC

Six of the top-10 most valued firms together added Rs 86,847.88 crore in market valuation last week, with HDFC Bank and Reliance Industries emerging as the biggest gainers in line with an overall optimistic trend in equities.

The market capitalisation (mcap) of HDFC Bank surged by Rs 20,235.95 crore to Rs 13,74,945.30 crore.

Reliance Industries added Rs 20,230.9 crore, taking its valuation to Rs 16,52,235.07 crore.

The valuation of ITC jumped Rs 17,933.49 crore to Rs 5,99,185.81 crore, and that of ICICI Bank climbed Rs 15,254.01 crore to Rs 9,22,703.05 crore. The market cap of Bharti Airtel soared Rs 11,948.24 crore to Rs 9,10,735.22 crore, and Hindustan Unilever rallied Rs 1,245.29 crore to Rs 5,49,863.10 crore.

However, the valuation of

PHOTO: PTI

State Bank of India tumbled by Rs 11,557.39 crore to Rs 7,13,567.99 crore.

The valuation of LIC declined by Rs 8,412.24 crore to Rs 5,61,406.80 crore, and that of Infosys dropped by Rs 2,283.75 crore to Rs 7,95,803.15 crore.

The market valuation of TCS dipped Rs 36.18 crore to Rs 15,08,000.79 crore.

Reliance Industries remained the most valued domestic firm, followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel, Infosys, State Bank of India, ITC, LIC and Hindustan Unilever. *—PTI*

Government cancels auction of 11 critical mineral blocks

NEW DELHI, 29 DEC

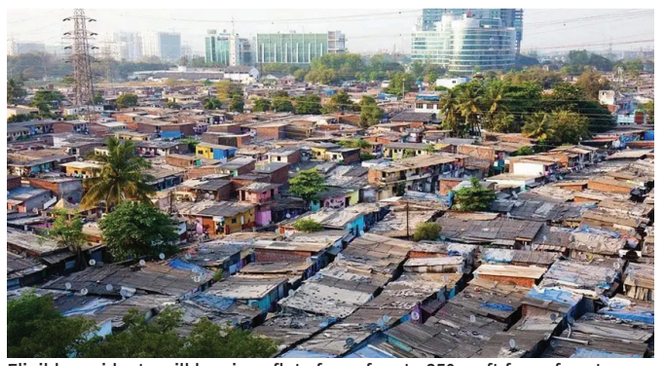
The government has cancelled the auction of 11 critical mineral blocks in the fourth round because of poor response. While no bids were received for four blocks, the remaining seven mines got less than three technically qualified bidders, revealed the annulment notice. The four blocks, which include tungsten and glauconite, are located in Chhattisgarh and Arunachal Pradesh. "Since there were nil bids received...the auction process for four mineral blocks stands annulled," the notice said. Critical minerals, such

PHOTO: PTI

as cobalt, copper, lithium, nickel and rare earths, play crucial roles in the production of clean energy technologies, ranging from wind turbines to electric vehicles. "Since there were less than three technically qualified bidders...the auction process of these seven mineral blocks stands annulled," the notice said. The government had earlier cancelled the auction of three critical mineral blocks in the third round, 14 blocks in the second round and 14 in the first tranche of critical minerals as the response was lukewarm. The government had earlier said that 24 critical and strategic mineral blocks have been sold in four rounds of auction. "Out of 48 blocks put to e-auction, 24 have been successfully auctioned, including four mining lease (ML) and 20 composite licenses (CL) blocks," the mines ministry had said. India is all set to launch a Critical Mineral Mission in the upcoming year to secure vital resources. *—PTI*

$3 BILLION PROJECT

Adani's Dharavi project is now called Navbharat Mega Developers



Eligible residents will be given flats free of up to 350 sq ft free of cost as part of $3 billion redevelopment of Dharavi *PHOTO: PTI*

MUMBAI, 29 DEC

Dharavi Redevelopment Project Pvt Ltd (DRPPL), the Adani-backed company undertaking the ambitious plan of revamping Dharavi slums, is rebranding itself in line with the company's "promise of building a modern, inclusive and vibrant community", the firm said.

DRPPL will now be called Navbharat Mega Developers Pvt Ltd (NMDPL) in response to the holistic value proposition and renewal of its corporate vision, it said in a statement. In Dharavi Redevelopment Project Pvt, Adani Group held an 80 per cent stake while the rest was with the state government. The shareholding in the rechristened firm will remain unchanged. Adani plans to turn 620 acres of prime land, about three-quarters of the size of New York's Central Park, into a glitzy urban hub. About 1 million people live in rickety shanties with open sewers and shared toilets in the densely populated slums, close to Mumbai's international airport. Eligible residents will be given flats free of up to 350 sq ft free of cost as part of the USD 3 billion redevelopment of rubbish-strewn Mumbai slum of Dharavi into a "world-class" district.

"The name Navbharat, which means 'New India', reflects the massive potential this project holds in shaping a better tomorrow. Mega highlights the sheer scale and impact of the work being undertaken, while Developers points to the role the company intends to play in building a thriving community," it said. *—PTI*

Adani Enterprises revenue to jump to ₹ 1.5 lakh cr

Adani Enterprises Ltd, the flagship company of the ports-to-energy conglomerate helmed by billionaire Gautam Adani, is likely to see consolidated revenue grow at a CAGR of 17.5 per cent and net earnings by 45.8 per cent over 2023-24 fiscal year (FY24) and FY27, a report said.AEL is one of India's largest listed incubators which has conceived, grown, matured and demerged many successful businesses, including ports company Adani Ports & SEZ, city gas distributor Adani Total Gas, power transmission company Adani Energy Solutions, renewable energy firm Adani Green Energy, Adani Power, and commodities firm Adani Wilmar.

FII, macroeco data to guide mkts

NEW DELHI, 29 DEC

Macroeconomic data announcements, trading activity of foreign investors and global trends will guide equity market movement this week, which would also mark the beginning of the new calendar year, analysts said.

Movement of rupee, which registered the steepest fall in almost two years to hit its lifetime intra-day low on Friday, will also be tracked by investors.

"Persistent FIIs (Foreign Institutional Investors) selling has been a source of pressure on Indian markets, and their stance in the new year

PHOTO: PTI

could shape near-term trends. Meanwhile, monthly auto sales data will also be closely watched. As the Q3 earnings season approaches, corporate quarterly updates will begin trickling in, setting the stage for market expectations," said Santosh Meena, head of research at Swastika Investmart Ltd.

On the international front, key economic indicators like manufacturing PMI data from China and the US, along with US jobless claims, will play a crucial role, Meena said.

"Auto sales data will be closely monitored for initial market cues. In the absence of any significant events, attention is likely to shift toward FII flows and currency movement, especially as the rupee continues to weaken against the US dollar," said Ajit Mishra, the SVP (research) at Religare Broking Ltd *—PTI*

India's exports to Australia up 64.4% to $643.7M in Nov

NEW DELHI, 29 DEC

India's exports to its trade agreement partner Australia rose 64.4 per cent year-on-year to USD 643.7M in November on account of healthy growth in sectors such as textiles, chemicals and agricultural products, according to the commerce ministry data.

However, the country's merchandise exports recorded a decline of 5.21 per cent year-on-year to USD 5.56B during April–November 2024–25, the preliminary data showed.

On the completion of two years of ECTA, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said the agreement has brought with it increased market access for Indian exporters, expanded opportunities for MSMEs and farmers and generated several employment avenues.

"We are committed to building on momentum that ECTA has generated and achieve AUD 100B trade target by 2030," Goyal said. *—PTI*

India plans to achieve 24X7 power for all in 2025

NEW DELHI, 29 DEC

India will set up more coal-fired and hydro-power plants and ramp up transmission infrastructure to achieve round-the-clock 'Power for All' in 2025, besides meeting rising demand fueled by economic expansion.

To meet the growing energy demand, the government has devised a major plan for power generation capacity addition and the expansion of transmission infrastructure.

According to Minister of State for Power Shripad Yesso Naik, India can definitely achieve '24x7' power for all with all the efforts in the ministry under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "We can do it. In 2025, we will be almost there to have 24X7 power for all in the country," Naik told PTI.

According to government estimates, peak power demand is expected to touch 270 GW in the summer season in 2025, up from the record high of 250 GW in May 2024 and 243 GW in September 2023. *—PTI*

FOR 5 YEARS

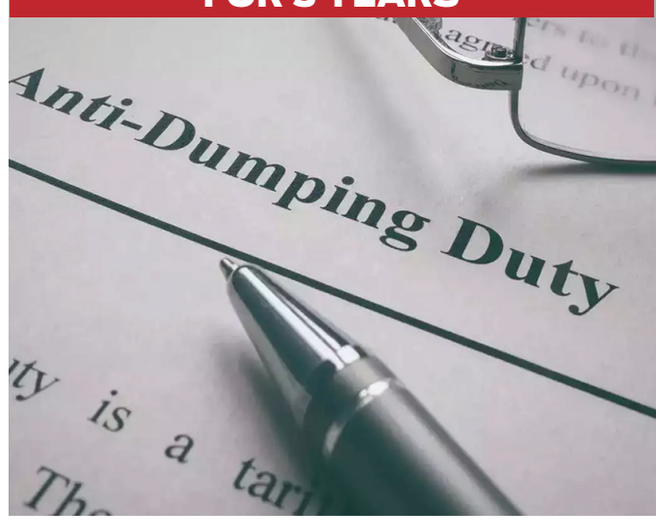


PHOTO: X

IN OCTOBER

Services exports hit historic high of $34.31B

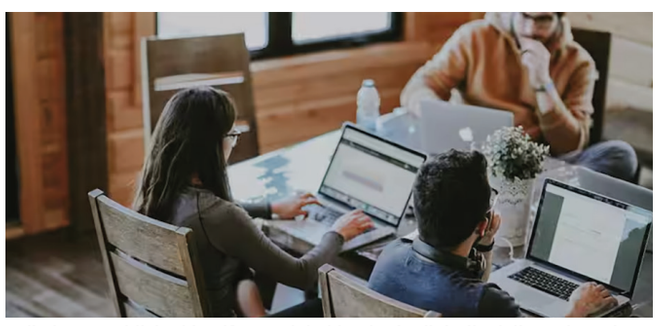
NEW DELHI, 29 DEC

Continuous investment in digital infrastructure, including data centres and high-speed internet, along with policy support, has propelled India's services exports to a "historic" milestone of USD 34.31B in October, a commerce ministry official said.

The official said India has established itself as a global leader in digitally delivered services exports, leveraging its robust IT sector and skilled workforce.

Services traded through computer networks, such as the internet, apps, emails and digital intermediation platforms, have grown exponentially.

"India's services sector



India has established itself as a global leader in digitally delivered services exports *PHOTO: PTI*

reached a historic milestone in October 2024, recording an all-time high in monthly exports of USD 34.31B, a 22.3 per cent increase compared to October 2023," the official added.

The key enabling factors that are helping the sector's growth included continuous investment in digital infrastructure, such as data centres and high-speed internet connectivity, initiatives like Digital India that have fostered a conducive environment for IT and digitally delivered services. Besides, partnerships with international firms have also expanded market access for Indian IT companies, the official said.

The country's digitally delivered services exports have witnessed a remarkable trajectory over the past two decades, soaring from a modest USD 30B in 2005 to USD 257B in 2023.

The growth was consistent pre-Covid, reaching USD 191B in 2019. However, the pandemic acted as a catalyst, propelling the sector to new heights. "By 2023, the exports nearly doubled from the pre-Covid peak," the official said. *—PTI*

Anti-dumping duty likely on 6 countries

NEW DELHI, 29 DEC

The commerce ministry has recommended imposition of an anti-dumping duty of up to USD 707 per tonne on imports of PVC paste resin, used to make artificial leather and other technical textiles' products, from six countries, including China, for five years, with an aim to guard domestic producers.

In its findings, the Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR), a wing of the ministry, has concluded that Poly Vinyl Chloride Paste Resin has been exported to India at a price below the normal value from certain players of the six nations – China, Korea, Malaysia, Norway, Taiwan and Thailand.

The move has resulted in dumping of the product into Indian markets.

The notification of the directorate said imports from these countries have caused material injury to the domestic industry.

"The authority recommends imposition of anti-dumping duty on the imports... so as to remove the injurious effects of the dumped imports on the domestic industry," it has said.

The recommended duty ranges between USD 89 and USD 707 per tonne. The finance ministry takes the final decision to impose duties.

The duty is aimed at ensuring fair trading practices and creating a level-playing field for domestic producers vis-a-vis foreign producers and exporters. *—PTI*

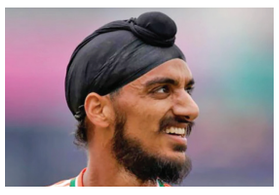


PHOTO:X

ICC T20I Cricketer of Year: Arshdeep nominated

DUBAI, 29 DEC

Indian pacer Arshdeep Singh has been nominated for the ICC Men's T20I Cricketer of the Year award following a stellar season in which he emerged as the joint highest wicket-taker and played a pivotal role in India's T20 World Cup triumph. The 25-year-old will compete for the prestigious honour alongside Pakistan's Babar Azam, Australia's Travis Head, and Zimbabwe's Sikandar Raza, all of whom are among the standout performers this year. Singh, a left-arm pacer, was a key figure in India's T20 World Cup victory in Barbados. He finished the year as the joint highest wicket-taker in T20Is, with 36 wickets in 18 matches at an impressive average of 13.5. His tally was the second-highest by an Indian pacer in T20Is in a calendar year, just behind Bhuvneshwar Kumar's 37 wickets in 2022. *—PTI*

Kerala enters final of National Men's Handball C'ship

CHANGANASSERY, 29 DEC

Kerala entered the summit clash of the 53rd Senior Men's Handball Championship for the first time, edging out Services 23-21 in the semifinals here on Sunday. It is the first time in the last 53 years that Kerala has made it to the final in the tournament. In the final, Kerala will face Chandigarh at St. Berchmans College Grounds later in the day. Chandigarh earned their spot in the final by defeating Indian Railways 32-30 in a nail-biting encounter. *—PTI*

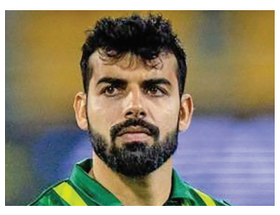


PHOTO:X

Shadab turns to Saqlain for revival in fortunes

LAHORE, 29 DEC

Pakistan's Shadab Khan has revealed he is working closely with former spinner Saqlain Mushtaq in order to rediscover his rhythm and win the trust of the national selectors ahead of the Champions Trophy. The 26-year-old has been out of favour with the national selectors after the World T20 Cup this year and has also not played in the one-day format since the World Cup in India last year. Shadab has been a regular in domestic circuit with the recent Champions Cup T20 competition his last assignment. He has faced concerns over his fitness and form. Saqlain, who has been Pakistan's head coach in the past, said he is working with Shadab to add more variations to his bowling skills. *—PTI*

Argentine women's soccer players released in Brazil

SAO PAULO, 29 DEC

Four players from the River Plate women's soccer team who were arrested for an alleged racial slur during a match have been released says Sao Paulo state's prison administration secretariat. Judge Fernando Oliveira Camargo freed Argentine footballers Candela Díaz, Camila Duarte, Juana Cángaro and Milagros Díaz from prison on Friday on condition they show up in court in Sao Paulo every month until the case is finished. The names of the four footballers were published in a document outside the Carandiru penitentiary in Sao Paulo as being released late Friday. The Argentine players spent Christmas in jail. Neither their lawyer nor their club revealed on Saturday whether they have returned home. The Brazil Ladies Cup also banned River from the tournament for two years. *—PTI*

Bumrah's brilliance sets up MCG thriller

Aus leads by 333 runs on Day 4 of Boxing Test

MELBOURNE, 29 DEC

Jasprit Bumrah left the hosts in a daze with a dream spell but the courageous Australian lower order steered the side to a commanding 333-run lead on Sunday, setting up the Boxing Day Test for an intriguing last-day finish.

Australia finished the fourth day at 228 for nine, leaving India skipper Rohit Sharma a bit irritated as the home team was in a spot at 156 for 8 at one stage.

Australia's number 8, 10 and 11 batters saw off nearly 35 overs and it could prove decisive if India doesn't bat exceedingly well on a track which has remained true in all four days.

Bumrah (4/53 in 17 overs) was an artist at work in the first two sessions and found his ally in Mohammed Siraj (3/66 in 22 overs) as momentum suddenly swung in India's favour.

Bumrah was unplayable for the better part of the second innings and completed 200 Test wickets on the day at an incredible average of 19.56.

A victory isn't impossible but for it to happen India would need something freakish from Rishabh Pant and at least a couple of senior batters need to shrug off the rust.

For the first time since the Perth Test, Bumrah had meaningful support from the other end as Australia lost three wickets in a space of 10 deliveries.

The Indian bowlers came out with renewed vigour in the second innings and the decision to give the new ball to Akash was a prudent one. *—PTI*

BUMRAH REACHES 200 TEST WICKETS, SETS RECORD

MELBOURNE, 29 DEC

Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah on Sunday became the second fastest Indian along with Ravindra Jadeja to complete 200 Test wickets and the first bowler ever to reach that milestone with a sub-20 average during the fourth day's play of the fourth Test against Australia here.

Bumrah dismissed Travis Head (1) for his 200th victim in the post-lunch session, joining Jadeja in the list of bowlers who are fastest to 200 wickets in Tests.

He is also the fastest Indian pace bowler to achieve the feat, going past legendary Kapil Dev who went past the mark in 50 matches.

Both Bumrah and Jadeja achieved the feat in their 44th Test, and overall he is 12th Indian bowler in the format to complete the landmark. *—PTI*

Nitish Kumar Reddy's family met Sunil Gavaskar, during the ongoing India-Australia Test series after his gritty century at MCG, on Sunday **PHOTO: X**

Wanted to prove critics wrong: Reddy

MELBOURNE, 29 DEC

Nitish Reddy wanted to confute his critics and the naysayers who doubted his ability to excel in Test format, and the gritty century at the iconic MCG was his way of conveying that he belongs to highest level of cricket.

A few former players, including a former chairman of selectors, were sceptical about Reddy's elevation as a Test player but with 293 runs in six innings and a batting average of 58-plus, he has answered them back in a befitting manner.

Reddy's 114 formed the cornerstone of India's first innings score of 369 and attracted a lot of attention on the young batter.

"Some people doubted me, like a youngster who played IPL, can't perform in such a big series. I know a lot of people did talk like that," Reddy said, sharing his frustration after the end of fourth day's play.

"I just want to make them feel wrong about what they have said about me and that's what I am doing, I want people to know that I am here to give my 100 percent for Indian team," the 21-year-old said. *—PTI*

Roar by MCG crowd after Reddy's hundred is something I never heard

-Nick Hockley, CA CEO

SA seals place in World Test C'ship

CENTURION, 29 DEC

South Africa tailenders Kagiso Rabada and Marco Jansen hung in against relentless fast bowler Mohammad Abbas for a tense two-wicket win in the first test on Sunday and sealed the Proteas' place in next year's World Test Championship final.

Jansen (16 not out) overshadowed Abbas' brilliant figures of 6-54 with a square driven boundary against the fast bowler as South Africa reached 150-8 just after lunch on Day 4 and escaped with a close win in the two-match series.

Abbas, making a comeback after more than three years in the test wilderness, had knocked back South Africa's tricky chase of 148 runs in a marathon 13-over spell before lunch on Day 4 as the home team limped to 99-8, losing four wickets for three runs.

However, Rabada changed gears in an unbroken 51-run stand with Jansen and made an unbeaten 31 off 26 balls with five fours to seal a memorable victory and denied Pakistan its first test win in South Africa in almost 18 years.

South Africa had started this WTC cycle with a loss against New Zealand, but since then the Proteas drew 1-1 in India and then went on to beat West Indies, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka to stay on top of the table.

India, Australia and Sri Lanka are the other teams still in contention for next June's WTC final against South Africa at Lord's. *—PTI*

India, Australia and Sri Lanka are the other teams still in contention for next June's WTC final against South Africa at Lord's **PHOTO: X**

OSAKA TO EXIT TENNIS UNLESS RESULTS FAVOUR HER

WELLINGTON, 29 DEC

Four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka said she would not "hang around" in tennis if her results fail to match her high expectations.

The 27-year-old Japanese player will play at the ASB tennis classic in Auckland on Monday her first match since she suffered a back injury in the China Open in October.

Osaka said on Sunday she was "humbled" by her form in 2024 in which she picked up her professional career after an almost 15-month break for the birth of her first child. She ended the season ranked 58.

"I don't think I'm the type of player that would hang around," Osaka said.

"I have a lot of respect for all the players on tour, but the point of my life that I'm at right now, if I'm not above a certain ranking, I don't see myself playing for a while.

"I'd rather spend time with my daughter if I'm not where I think I should be and where I feel like I can be."

Osaka had a 22–17 win–loss singles record in 2024, reaching the quarterfinals at Doha and in the Netherlands. "I think 2024 humbled me, but I also feel like I grew a lot," she said. *—PTI*

DOPING CASES

Kept in the dark: Djokovic

BRISBANE, 29 DEC

On the eve of his return to the court, Novak Djokovic has weighed in on tennis' high-profile doping cases and criticised what he perceives as double standards in the sport.

The former world No. 1, who is chasing a record 25th Grand Slam title at next month's Australian Open, expressed his frustration on Sunday at being "kept in the dark" regarding top-ranked Jannik Sinner's doping case.

Djokovic is the top seed in the Brisbane International this week, making his first appearance at the event since 2009. He will also team up with Australia's Nick Kyrgios in doubles, with the duo headlining Monday's action.

Off the court, Djokovic lent his voice on Sunday to Kyrgios's strong criticisms made a day earlier, speaking out about the doping case involving world No.1 Jannik Sinner.

"I'm not questioning whether (Sinner) took the banned substance intentionally or not... We've had plenty of players in the past and currently under suspension, not even testing positive to banned substances. Some players ... are waiting for their case to be resolved for over a year. I've been really frustrated ... to see we've been kept in the dark for at least five months (on the Sinner case)."

International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) charged both Sinner and former women's world No.1 Iga Swiatek with anti-doping breaches earlier in year. *—PTI*

Ashi Chouksey clinches maiden women's 3P national title

BHOPAL, 29 DEC

Ashi Chouksey overcame a strong field that had the likes of Olympians Anjum Moudgil and Shriyanka Sadangi to clinch her maiden national title in the 50m rifle 3-positions event in Bhopal on Sunday.

Ashi shot a superb 466.7, a full 3.1 points clear of two-time Olympian Anjum at her home range, the MP State Academy, during the 67th National Shooting Championship.

Upcoming shooter Sakshi Sunil Padekar of Maharashtra won the bronze with an effort of 451.3. She then went on to win a silver in the junior women's 3P as well to round-off a successful day.

Ashi, who has been in great form over the past two years and was also a part of the Paris Olympic Games trials, extended her run of good form with a solid 590 in qualifications, to get into the eight-woman match-up in third place.

Bhakti Bhaskar Khamkar of Maharashtra topped the qualification field with a blazing 592, while Anjum qualified second with 590.

In the final, however, Ashi opened up a 2.3-points gap over Anjum at the end of the first Kneeling position round. She maintained the lead after the 15 shots in the second Prone position also. *—PTI*

Ashi Chouksey **PHOTO: X**

Inter win at Cagliari, level up with Atalanta

ROME, 29 DEC

Thirteen goals scored. Zero conceded. Four wins in four matches across all competitions. Ever since a 1–0 loss at Bayer Leverkusen in the Champions League this month, Inter Milan has been virtually perfect.

The latest performance for the defending Serie A champion was a 3–0 win at Cagliari on Saturday, when Nicolò Barella set up two goals.

The victory moved Inter level on points with Atalanta atop the league, ahead of Atalanta playing Lazio later and attempting to extend its winning streak to 12 matches.

Inter also has a match in hand. They will face Atalanta on Thursday in the semifinals of Italian Super Cup in Saudi Arabia. Juventus plays AC Milan in the other semifinal.

Alessandro Bastoni put Inter ahead with a looping header following a cross from Barella after the break. Lautaro Martinez scored his first Serie A goal in nearly two months by volleying in another cross from Barella. Then Hakan Calhanoglu converted a penalty.

Earlier, Patrick Vieira's Genoa won at Empoli 2–1 with goals from Milan Badelj and Caleb Ekuban; and Parma beat Monza 2–1 with a header from Lautaro Rodrigo Valenti to spoil the debut of new Monza coach Salvatore Bocchetti. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

MOTORCYCLE DRAG RACING

Hemanth Muddappa bags 15th National title

CHENNAI, 29 DEC

Indian rider Hemanth Muddappa of Mantra Racing on Sunday bagged his 15th National title at the fourth and final round of the MMSC FMSCI Indian National Motorcycle Drag Racing Championship 2024 here.

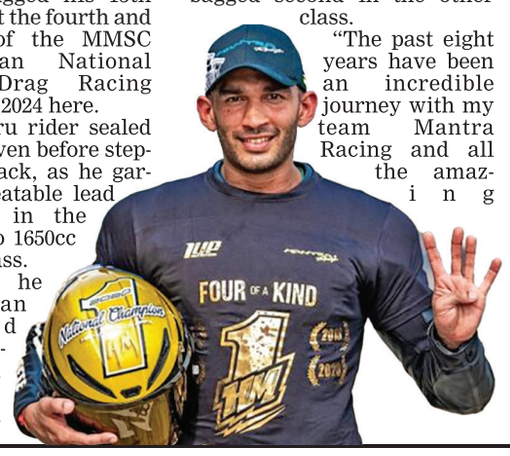
The Bengaluru rider sealed his 13th title, even before stepping on the track, as he garnered an unbeatable lead of 29 points in the 4-stroke 1051 to 1650cc Super Sport class.

On Sunday, he achieved an unparalleled milestone taking part in three more classes and won two of them to claim a triple crown in the 2024 Nationals, an unprecedented 15 career National titles. He bagged second in the other class.

"The past eight years have been an incredible journey with my team Mantra Racing and all the amazing mechanics who made this possible. This moment of triumph and celebration belongs to my family, friends, and everyone who supported me through thick and thin," Muddappa said.

"To become the first athlete in Indian motorsports to achieve 15 National titles fills me with immense pride and joy. It feels like being the Neil Armstrong of Indian motorsports – breaking new ground and inspiring others to dream big."

Aptly nicknamed as 'LightningR1', for his brute speed, Sunday's feats on the superbike sets him apart as the only individual to win 15 FMSCI National titles in any discipline of Indian motorsports. *—PTI*



Atalanta's win streak ends at 11th match

ROME, 29 DEC

Atalanta's winning streak ended at 11 matches after drawing at fourth-placed Lazio 1–1 in Serie A. Substitute Marco Brescianini's late equalizer meant the Bergamo squad remained atop Serie A.

Four minutes after he went on, Brescianini finished off a counterattack set up by Nicolo Zaniolo and Ademola Lookman.

Fisayo Dele-Bashiru scored midway through the first half for Lazio after receiving a ball over the top and blasting past onrushing goalkeeper Marco Carnesecchi.

Atalanta will face Inter in its next match on Thursday, in the semifinals of the Italian Super Cup in Saudi Arabia.

Juventus plays AC Milan in the other semifinal. *—PTI*